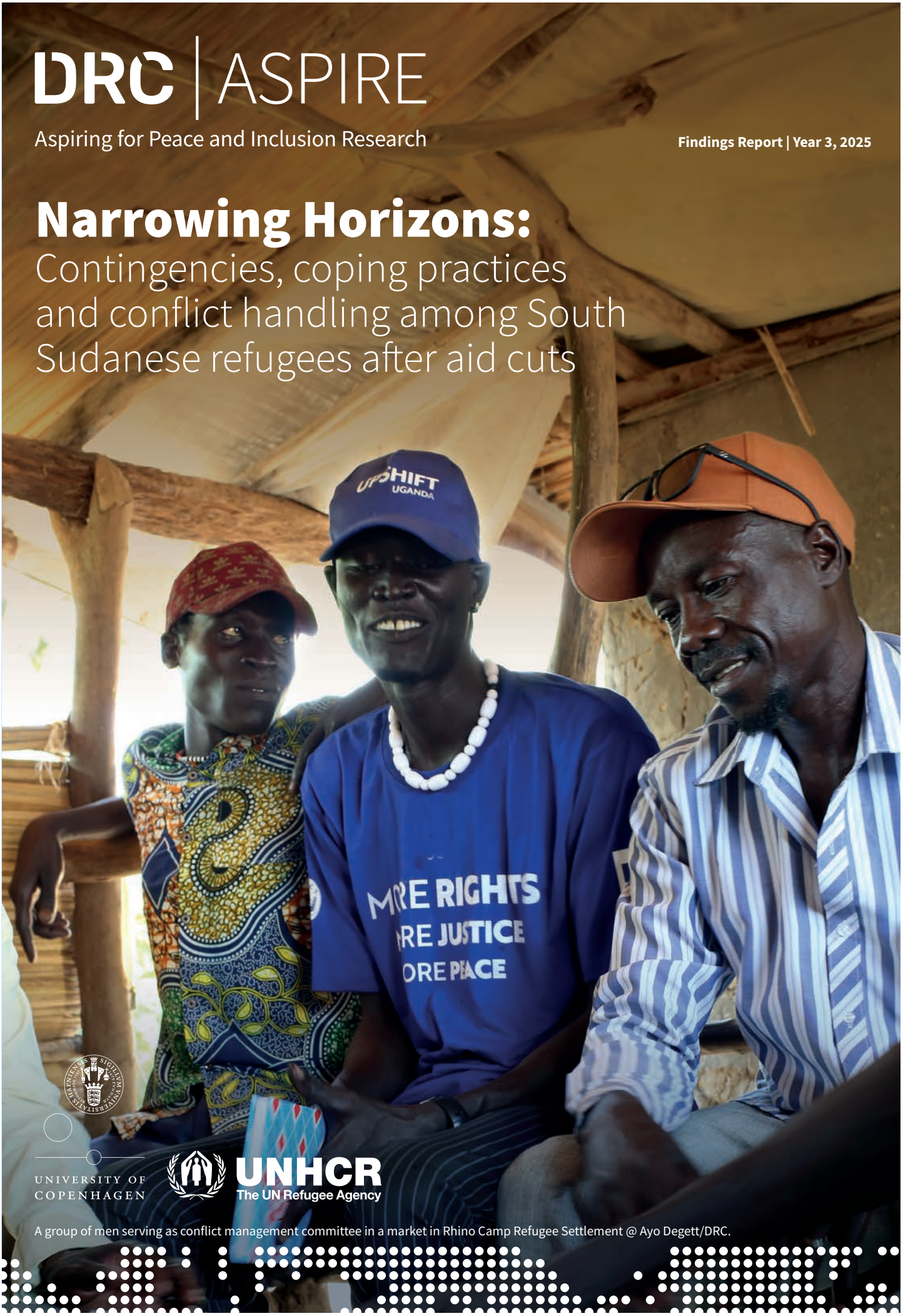
DRC | ASPIRE

Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research

Findings Report | Year 3, 2025

Narrowing Horizons:

Contingencies, coping practices and conflict handling among South Sudanese refugees after aid cuts



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A group of men serving as conflict management committee in a market in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

The 2025 report

This report presents an analysis of the findings of the research project, Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research (ASPIRE), during its third year of implementation, 2025, in Uganda and Kenya. It has been written by Ayo Degett (PhD), Programme Manager (Research), Pernille Sikker Hansen, Project Officer of ASPIRE, both with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), and Susan Reynolds Whyte, Professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen. The project has been funded by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, during the third year of its implementation and the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA) in partnership with UNHCR, during the first two years. The content and opinions expressed in this report represent the authors' views and should not be attributed to, and do not necessarily represent, the views of UNHCR or the European Union.

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For their suggestions and inputs to this report, we are also grateful to the members of ASPIRE's Academic Advisory Board: Andhira Yousif Kara, Anine Hagemann, Ayla Erin Bonfiglio, Benjamin Yaw McCabe, Bisimwa Mulemangabo, Bruno Braak, Christian Boehm, David Kyaddondo, Delia Burns, Diana Felix da Costa, Foni Joyce Vuni, Freddie Carver, Gemma Davies, Heiko Henkel, John Justin Kenyi, Kate Pincock, Leben Moro, Line Grete Birgitta Brylle, Marianne Bach Mosebo, Nanna Schneidermann, Naohiko Omata, Ryan Joseph O'Byrne, Tania Dræbel, Tom Scott-Smith and Yotam Gidron.

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Young man producing and selling baskets in Kakuma Refugee Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

Executive summary

Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research (ASPIRE) is a long-term research project implemented by Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in partnership with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and the University of Copenhagen (UCPH). It aims to understand refugees' efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence through their engagement with their peers, their communities, and interventions by political authorities and humanitarian, development, and peace actors. When the research project was initiated in 2023, it followed refugees from South Sudan in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement, northern Uganda. In 2024, the project expanded to include Kalobeyei Settlement and Kakuma Refugee Camp in western Kenya. Leveraging other projects in South Sudan, the research team conducted two field research trips to South Sudan in 2025; data from these trips are also reflected in this report.

ASPIRE works with peer researchers, refugees trained in ethnographic methods who follow conflicts and conflict-mitigation in their own neighbourhoods. The main theme of the 2023 report was refugee initiatives aimed at managing incipient conflicts and preventing escalation. In 2024, we examined the possibilities for dealing with conflicts by focusing on the authorities - statutory and customary - among whom refugees navigate. In 2025, we examine the effects of substantial reductions in humanitarian assistance and compare Uganda and Kenya with respect to emerging conflict patterns and the ways in which locally led initiatives and community structures that support the peaceful handling of conflicts are affected.

The overall argument of the report is that the recent cuts in humanitarian support lead to narrowing horizons for camp-based South Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Uganda. While they once hoped to build better, sustainable lives for themselves and their children in asylum over the long term, reductions in aid have forced them to focus on immediate survival needs and to make more short-sighted decisions, which may trigger conflict. The stark decline in the number of households receiving food assistance and the reductions in the amounts of food for those still eligible impose severe constraints on refugees' ability to access basic means of survival. While refugees based in Rhino Camp have better access to farmland and livestock compared to refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, increased pressure on these resources can be a conflict trigger.

Under these conditions, people are pushed to orient their actions toward immediate survival rather than long-term goals and planning. Refugees actively seek to adopt and adapt coping practices as best they can with a view to past experiences, current concerns, family relations, and moral and social obligations. However, negative coping practices are increasingly adopted, putting pressure on intimate relations and triggering conflict. The severe constraints also spark coping practices such as theft, debt, or forced marriage that involve increased safety risks and risks of conflict at both the community and household levels. There are concrete differences across the camp settings: theft of livestock or crops is more common in Rhino, while we see more conflicts over stolen phones and food items in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. But many coping practices and resulting conflicts are similar.

In their efforts to address conflicts arising from current coping practices, people reach out to and engage with formal, semi-formal, or informal actors. However, many protection services and formal security providers, such as the Community Peace and Protection Teams (CPPTs) in Kenya, have been affected by cutbacks and are now under-resourced, as are protection activities, protection staff, and help desks provided by humanitarian actors. Semi-formal actors, such as the Refugee Welfare Committees in Uganda, have been less directly affected as they rely on volunteers. Such actors may be called upon more frequently as the statutory organizations retract. Indeed, this may look like increased "localisation" as dependence on more remote agencies declines. Yet the semi- and informal actors are less able to take on the additional burden, as they must devote more time and resources to their own survival. This also has a gendered aspect, as we see a decline in female community leaders, who are often single parents (as opposed to their male colleagues) and need to reprioritise their attention to the family in times of extreme precarity.

A woman who arrived in South Sudan earlier in the week from Kakuma, is selling dry fish in an informal settlement in Juba @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

1. Introduction

One night, around 1:00 AM in Kakuma, Ayak, an elderly woman, was awoken by a loud sound. She was frightened but walked to the window, where she saw that the kitchen door had been forced open. “Thief! Thief! Thief!” Ayak shouted and rushed out of the house. A man jumped out of the kitchen, running away with stolen rice and flour in his hands. She shouted more loudly as she ran after him, which alerted some youths from the neighbouring compounds. These youths started chasing the man, and when they caught him, they began beating him violently. Ayak was afraid they might beat the thief to death, so she quickly called the block leader, who arrived swiftly with the CPPTs (Community Peace and Protection Teams), and they managed to put an end to the fight.

Since the heavy reductions in humanitarian assistance in 2025, community members and camp-based security providers have reported a significant rise in theft and other crimes. Cases range from minor ones – such as children stealing food – to major cases of organised theft and robbery by gangs. The incident involving Ayak occurred in September 2025 and exemplifies the desperate situation many people face, risking their lives for a handful of rice and flour. The aid reductions have led to an increase in theft, but also a decrease in the number of security actors in the settlements. Ayak and the thief were lucky to have support from a CPPT member. A number of studies (NRG 2025; REACH 2025; WFP 2025a, 2025b; Halakhe 2025) have documented the economic and protection-related consequences of the significant aid cuts in Kenya and Uganda.

In this report, we ask: In the face of the aid cuts, which coping practices are triggering conflicts? How are these changed conflict patterns handled peacefully? And what are the overall options for improvements under the existing circumstances?

The report will explore the drivers of the changing conflict pattern by providing an overview of key factors relating to the current economic circumstances that appear to influence conflict drivers (referred to as ‘conditions’), the way people reflect differently about their options and adjust coping practices (referred to as ‘subjectivity’), and the way community structures and members deal with these changed conflict patterns through individual and group efforts (referred to as ‘endeavours for peace’).

We argue that with recent cuts in humanitarian support, South Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Uganda are experiencing narrowing horizons. While they once hoped for better lives for themselves and their children, during life in asylum, they now find themselves more concerned with meeting immediate survival needs. As the economic consequences of the aid cuts materialise, refugees adopt and adapt practices to the conditions in their contexts and to what they see as possible. Some of these coping practices involve increased safety risks and risks of conflict at both community and household levels; out of desperation, many people engage in practices such as theft, debt, forced marriage, or deception that can be harmful. At the same time, some might eye opportunities for income generation based on others’ desperation, which may add extra fuel to the fire.

The report will explore the drivers of the changing conflict pattern by providing an overview of key factors relating to the three analytical aspects that the ASPIRE research project is building on:

- **The possibilities for managing life in the current economic context (conditions);**
- **The way people reflect differently about their options and adjust coping practices (subjectivity);**
- **And the way community structures and members deal with these changed conflict patterns through individual and group efforts (endeavours for peace).**

1.1. Background

This report presents research results from the third year of the ASPIRE project. Originally planned to last 15 years, ASPIRE's objective was to generate new, in-depth knowledge about how young people affected by the civil war(s) in South Sudan contribute, over time, to peaceful coexistence in their communities and how they perceive their options and challenges. Simultaneously, the research investigated how interventions by actors in the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace nexus are used by and influence young people in their trajectories and practices.

Due to severe funding reductions at the beginning of 2025, ASPIRE has been deprioritised and will not continue as originally planned. However, the project is based within the broader research capacity PARTOCA (Participatory Research Team on Community-led Action) in DRC, which will continue. Building on the evidence, learning, and approach of ASPIRE, PARTOCA will advance knowledge of, and continue to document, locally led support initiatives and endeavours for peace through longitudinal ethnographic cross-border research. The PARTOCA research initiative provides an improved understanding of how displaced populations navigate their circumstances, seek opportunities, and adapt to changing conditions as they evolve across time and borders, with the overall purpose of influencing and adjusting policies and programming. Currently, PARTOCA is engaged in four additional research projects[1] across Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan, with a common focus on community-led support structures and coping practices. They cover people affected by chronic health conditions, socioeconomic decisions, drivers of intergenerational disagreements and moral dilemmas, refugee-host community conflicts, and the evaluation of humanitarian programming. This report draws on evidence and results from these projects, in addition to the data collected specifically for ASPIRE. Data on conflict drivers and mitigation are present in all the aforementioned studies, but they are not the primary focus, as in ASPIRE. The team therefore hopes to secure resources for a study that, along the lines of ASPIRE, focuses specifically on peaceful coexistence.

1 These projects have been financed with support from the John Templeton Foundation, Novo Nordisk Foundation, the World Bank Group and DANIDA.

1.2. Relevance

The South Sudan conflict has produced one of the largest refugee crises in the world. Many studies and assessments highlight the multiple barriers, constraints, and limitations that seem to keep future generations in a vicious cycle of poverty, resource scarcity, illiteracy, unemployment, violence, and (sometimes) retaliation (Lynge 2015, 8; DDG and DRC 2017; Khadka 2017, 5). However, there is limited knowledge about how young South Sudanese refugees themselves navigate these constraints as they seek to ensure peace. ASPIRE, under the PARTOCA initiative, is unique in its exploration of issues from the refugees' point of view. This approach builds on findings from a longitudinal research project on participation in humanitarian decision-making led by the DRC in partnership with UCPH (2018-2023). Earlier research showed that many young South Sudanese refugees succeed in breaking out of negative patterns of domestic and inter-ethnic violence, improving their relations with host communities, becoming self-reliant, demanding participation and accountability from humanitarian actors, and promoting peaceful coexistence (Degett 2023). Tailored, adaptable, and quality support for people's efforts to attain more stable and peaceful social environments is more relevant than ever, as humanitarian funding is declining significantly. By discovering, examining, and mapping people's existing efforts, ASPIRE seeks to develop more solid and nuanced understandings of the existing structures and initiatives for peaceful coexistence.

These research findings will appeal to a broad range of stakeholders engaged with refugees, young people, peacebuilding, the South Sudan situation, and related areas. They are relevant for many current policy agendas, global standards, priorities, and commitments on localisation, locally-led approaches, participation and solutions, and self-reliance.[2]

2 These include the Grand Bargain (particularly the Participation Revolution) (IASC 2023); the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) (particularly Commitment 1: communities and people affected by crisis and vulnerability [...] can exercise their rights and participate in actions and decisions that affect them; and Commitment 7: access support that is continually adapted and improved based on feedback and learning) (CHS 2024); the humanitarian-development nexus, also referred to as the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (EU 2017) coming out of the New Way of Working (NWoW) (UN 2024c); the UN Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (UN 2024d); the Peacebuilding Impact Hub (UN 2024b); UNHCR 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (paras 13, 34, 40) (UN 2018); the 2019 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (OECD 2024); the OECD DAC and International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) Common Position on Addressing Forced Displacement with a Comprehensive Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approach (OECD DAC and INCAF 2023); A New Agenda for Peace (UN 2023); and the UN Pact for the Future (UN 2024a).

A young woman who recently gave birth in Juba is waiting to go back to Rhino Camp, where she grew up as a refugee @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

2. Conditions, subjectivity and endeavours

This report draws on the analytical framework set out in the original ASPIRE research design and applied in the two earlier published research reports (2023 and 2024). It sees refugees' endeavours (their actions) in relation to their subjectivity (their considerations for specific actions) and conditions (the current limits and opportunities for action in their lives).

The literature on people's reactions and resistance to humanitarian initiatives and rules, directions, and structures is extensive (Ferguson 1994; Scott 1990; Kibreab 2004; Kaiser 2007; Allen 1996). However, not much has been written about how people living under the auspices of humanitarian actors in camps sometimes try to influence decisions proactively and improvise initiatives that run parallel to the established systems, as did the Rumour Tracker and the Leopards described in the 2023 report and the customary courts described in the 2024 report (Degett and Whyte 2023; Degett et al. 2024). By introducing the analytical framework, we explore the various ways in which refugees engage with conflict and with institutions that address it: both reactively and proactively. These endeavours unfold under specific conditions within the humanitarian context of refugee camps. Conditions include the power relations of resource control, which are dominated by authorities and humanitarian actors who set policies and governance structures. They also include ethnic leaders who control certain arenas of power and authority, sometimes as representatives of influential persons and clans back home.

2.1. Conditions

Conditions and humanitarian assistance are affected by wider historical, political, and financial forces. Conflicts and political changes in other parts of the world mean cuts in food rations for refugees in Uganda and Kenya (OCHA 2024). The violence in South Sudan, including hostilities related to the reduction in grazing areas due to climate change, can ignite conflicts among refugees in Uganda and Kenya (Bushby and Regede 2024). The current war in Sudan is sending refugees through South Sudan to Uganda and Kenya, just as the escalating conflict in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) does, increasing the pressure on a system that is already overstretched (REACH 2025, 2). In 2025, donors' cutbacks in aid and funding have further exacerbated the conditions to which refugees in the camps are subjected, constraining the range of possibilities available.

The cut in food assistance has consequences that refugees are responding to. In addition to immediately visible harms, there are long-term effects that manifest gradually (see Nixon 2011 for discussion of immediate harm and "slow violence"). Some of these stem from attempts to address the immediate problem of food insecurity. When a camp-based refugee household loses access to food assistance and income opportunities dwindle, coping practices such as reducing food intake, stealing, borrowing money, or withdrawing children from school accumulate adverse effects over time. During the first months, effects may not be detrimental. But over time, such practices lead to poorer health, psychological damage, and diminished lifespans.

In our 2023 report (which only covered Uganda), we focused on a number of specific conditions that seemed to come up repeatedly in the data: 1) resource scarcity fuelled by the cuts in food assistance; 2) the increase in armed violence in Central Equatoria State in South Sudan in early 2023, leading to retaliation incidents among refugees; and 3) substance abuse and rampant violence by youths

arriving from the former Protection of Civilians (POCs) sites in South Sudan. The 2024 report focused on the landscape of formal and informal authorities as conditions for handling conflicts. Here, the role and (overlapping) mandates of the many formal and semi-formal structures and institutions engaged in handling conflicts were explored, including statutory institutions such as the police and formal security-providers, the Refugee Welfare Council (RWC) structure, and the semi-formal ethnic (or customary) structures like the customary court in the Nuer community, N4. The situations and people's efforts for coping with them, described and explored in these earlier published reports, remain highly relevant to current conflict dynamics but are under increasing pressure.

In this year's report, we focus on how current economic circumstances affect conflict patterns, people's reflections and coping practices, and how community structures address these conflicts. The dramatic cuts in food aid and other services alter the possibilities for managing, forcing people to rely more on short-term survival. We see the possibilities as conditions for action within the changing context. Often, these include coping practices that spur everyday conflicts, such as petty crime to access food for survival, as described in the example in the introduction. At the same time, many formal and informal authorities engaged in handling conflicts have been scaled back or weakened.

2.2. Subjectivity

In this landscape of limited food aid, reduced services, and weakened authorities, people face narrowing horizons as they navigate their options. This leads us to the notion of subjectivity. Refugees are subjects in a double sense: they are subject to conditions and authors of action. They are subjected to the procedures and interventions of humanitarian assistance and authority structures in the camp for handling conflict. And they act as subjects with concerns, capabilities, knowledge, and experiences. Memories of past engagements with actors in the Humanitarian Development and Peace (HDP) nexus, statutory actors, and customary courts are particularly important for refugees from South Sudan, since many of them have fled several times before and have lived in and out of these settings their whole lives (Degett and Whyte 2023). They draw on earlier experience to assess their current conditions and possibilities.

2.3. Endeavours

People's endeavours are the central object of study for ASPIRE. We define endeavours as refugees' ways of managing their lives and improving their circumstances by directing their efforts towards what is important to them. There are endeavours for livelihoods, for children's futures, for security, and for family care. In the wake of recent drastic aid cuts, endeavours are oriented towards day-to-day survival. Our project is focused on endeavours for peace at the immediate level of individuals, families, and communities. Some of these endeavours aim to prevent conflict from exploding by catching it early, as described in several examples in the 2023 report (Degett and Whyte 2023). One example was the refugee-driven rumour-tracker project that successfully prevented false

rumours from spreading in Rhino Camp, stopping simmering conflicts from boiling over. Others work to mediate conflicts that have already arisen. In this report, we discuss the changing patterns of conflict and conflict management that challenge local endeavours for peace.

Recognizing refugee endeavours requires an appreciation of subjectivity: that their actions are informed by considerations about past experiences, similar situations, and what is possible. At the same time, we find it important to highlight how the current conditions have reduced the space for navigating one's situation in a peaceful, morally acceptable manner. While refugees in Uganda are not physically confined to camps, unlike refugees in Kenya who do face legal mobility restrictions, the confining dynamics of reduced aid and the narrowing range of options for sustainable actions may spur a sense of *stuckness* (see also Jefferson et al. 2019). To navigate - that is, to move within a changing context towards feasible and advantageous horizons - has become more constrained and difficult (see also Vigh 2006; Hastrup 2009).

Area on the outskirts of Nairobi hosting South Sudanese refugees who come to town for medical treatment or in the hope of education and employment @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

3. Methodology and research locations

3.1. Methodology and research set-up

ASPIRE employs methods that are participatory in nature and techniques that support research participants' involvement in the research process, including determining the priorities of the study, contextualising the information collected, and collecting data through community-based peer researchers, referred to as Field Assistants (FAs). This strong focus on participatory approaches ensures ownership of the research, accountability, and the meaningful implementation of global participation commitments. By its explicit focus on participatory methods, ASPIRE seeks to counter the history of colonial attitudes and extractive practices in field research, which often appear to lack a connection between findings and the priorities of the communities studied. At the same time, these collaborative approaches give priority to seeing and understanding the life experiences of young South Sudanese in their own right: their own expertise and their capacity to create and direct new knowledge on the central themes of the research.

3.1.1. Field assistants and community forums

ASPIRE's current research takes place in three camp-based settings[3]: Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in northern Uganda, Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement in western Kenya. The research is being implemented by the PARTOCA research team, which comprises twelve local FAs employed by DRC in Uganda and Kenya, who are conducting research in their own communities, supported by a global team of four programme and research specialists. The FAs have different backgrounds reflecting the diversity in the settlements; they represent the most prominent South Sudanese ethnic groups in the settlements, including the Nuer, Dinka, Anuak, and four Equatorian ethnic groups, as well as the ethnic groups of the host community, namely the Turkana in Kenya and the Lugbara and Kakwa in Uganda.

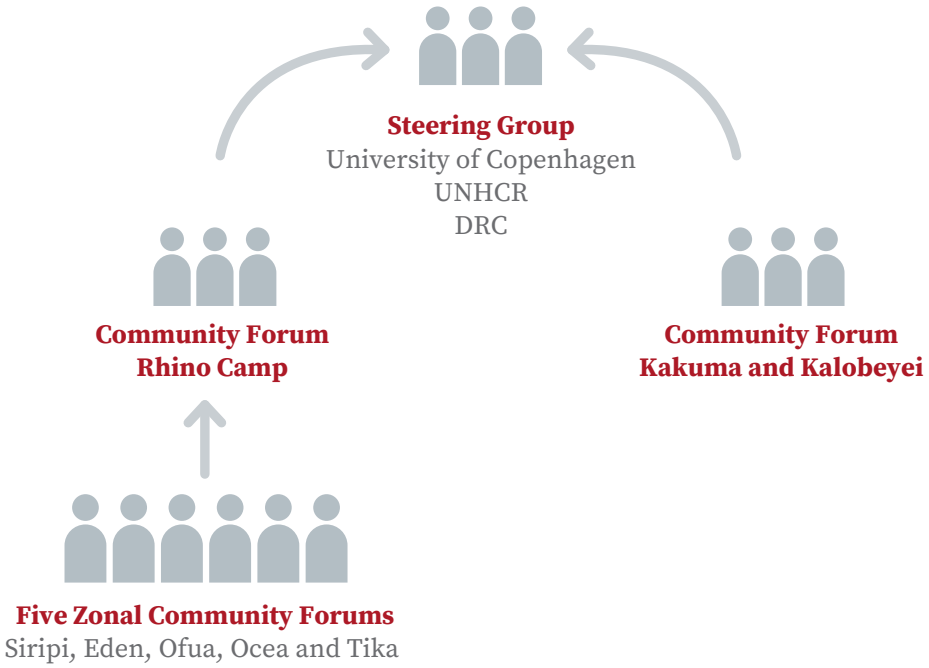
The FAs have been trained over several years in anthropological methodologies and are technically supervised once a week by the global research experts, who also contribute to data generation through on-site fieldwork and interviews approximately six times per year[4]. From the outset of implementation, the FAs have selected the initiatives, cases, and research sites they consider most relevant to ASPIRE's overall research focus. This approach gives significant ownership to the FAs and, by extension, to members of the communities that are the subjects of the study.

A central part of the ASPIRE participatory approach is the Community Forum modality (see Figure 1). The FAs in each research location facilitated the selection of the Community Forums, employing the age, gender, and diversity (AGD) principle. The Community Forum modality has been advantageous to the project, as the members serve as representatives who receive information about the implementation of ASPIRE to be shared locally. The Forum members are equipped with key information about the project, enabling them to act as ambassadors for the project and to answer questions from the inhabitants of the settlements (for instance, regarding data management and confidentiality). The Community Forums at the camp level help the research team to include community members' questions, input, and suggestions by acting as focal points in the areas of implementation. They are the primary audience for receiving the project's findings annually and for providing feedback to ensure the validity of the data.

3 We use the term 'camp' in reference to our research locations, which differ from urban or peri-urban areas or self-settled non-camp environments. We acknowledge the difference between more traditional refugee camps with an enforced encampment policy and integrated settlements, but for the purpose of the reading flow, we will refer to them all as camps (see further explanation under 'Governing refugees').

4 See previous reports for a detailed description of the methodology and training of FAs (Degett and Whyte 2023; Degett et al. 2024)

Figure 1:
Governance Structure



3.1.2. Participant observations of endeavours

ASPIRE explores the choice of action by young people and the central actors in their life-worlds over time. Mainly, the project seeks to understand 'what people do' in addition to 'what they say' and 'what they say they do'. Qualitative methods widely used in anthropological research, such as participant observation, life-course interviews, and focus group discussions, are particularly well-suited to this focus. Through participant observation, the FAs follow situations and interactions over time by being present and observing the statements, actions, and reactions. The research methods are therefore iterative; interviews, conversations, and observations are structured to follow and build on the findings of previous interactions. The FAs document their participant observation in systematic, comprehensive field notes, which are subsequently discussed during supervision sessions.

Concretely, the FAs follow interventions and initiatives undertaken by groups, as well as, in some cases, by individuals. These are also referred to as 'extended cases' or 'case stories', inspired by the 'extended case method' (Burawoy 1998), which is an approach often used to assemble a story about a set of related people dealing with an issue, for example, a conflict, over time. The extended cases that the FAs have chosen to follow are highly diverse, and the FAs' own positions within their communities shape the networks they are able to draw on and their individual focus areas. While some cases involve short-term conflicts that are triggered and handled relatively quickly, others unfold, escalate, and are handled over several months. In practice, following a long-term case typically involves participating in several mediation meetings, observing ceremonies and events, and interviewing various actors from both sides of the conflict. Through this approach, the FAs gain nuanced and detailed insights into the nature of a conflict and its resolution, as well as the key actors involved over the course of the case.

3.1.3. Data

Because ASPIRE is exploratory in nature, a wide variety of data is collected. On a weekly basis, FAs submit a field report of a case they are following. The field report is based on field notes from participant observation, conversations, and informal interviews. All field reports are coded according to thematic areas, key actors, and location. Current codes include 33 thematic topics and 18 overall categories of key actors (Figures 2 & 3). Since ASPIRE takes an exploratory approach, additional themes and relevant actors are added to the list as they are discovered. The key actors include broad categories such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Refugee-Led Organisations (RLOs), church groups, the RWC, tribal councils,

the Department of Refugee Services (DRS), police, and safety groups, as well as the prominent ethnic groups and nationalities in the settlements. At the time of writing (November 2025), the total number of extended cases reported and analysed by the FAs in 2025 is 108: 68 in Rhino camp and 40 in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. During the process of analysis, the extended cases are coded into thematic categories that reflect the types of conflicts appearing. The main thematic areas in the extended cases in 2025 were conflicts related to: theft, pregnancies, marriage, domestic violence, plot allocation, farming, food (in)security, and the 'prioritisation approach' to food assistance (mainly the eligibility and selection criteria). Often, a single case contains several overlapping themes. While prioritisation approaches to food assistance and food insecurity were explicit causes of some conflicts, they are indirect drivers of many.

A central part of the ASPIRE project is the mapping of stakeholders working with peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the settlements. The FAs monitor all relevant community-driven initiatives and stakeholders operating within their respective zones. The stakeholders include international and national NGOs, RLOs, Community-based Organisations (CBOs), and informal groups. While some stakeholders implement interventions directly related to peace, others are not formally recognized by either themselves or the community as implementers of peace initiatives, yet they still contribute to mediating conflicts.
At the time of writing this report (November 2025), the stakeholder map includes 87 stakeholders in Rhino Camp, of which 19 are currently inactive, and 92 in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, all of which are active. In addition to the overall mapping of stakeholders, the FAs map the traditional structures – such as councils of elders and customary courts – in the settlements. Having an overview of the traditional authorities that govern conflict resolution in the settlement and how these intersect with formal authorities such as the police and elected refugee leaders allows us to improve the understanding of these structures and to compare them across Kenya and Uganda. In terms of customary institutions, we have currently tracked 35 customary courts, councils, and groups of elders in Rhino Camp, 13 in Kakuma, and 17 in Kalobeyei.

The data are collected and stored responsibly, in accordance with existing guidelines on confidentiality in humanitarian action and research ethics. The project follows the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC) standards for data-protection in humanitarian settings (ALLEA 2023; Marelli 2024). All individuals and actors are assigned pseudonyms from the first point of recording their statements and actions, and the project does not store any data that could identify them. In this report, such data has been removed to ensure anonymity.

Roadside shop in Turkana County near Kakuma Refugee Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

Figure 2:
Thematic areas

Themes	
Aid envy/resettlement-related	Plot allocation/access
Children/young people	Pregnancy
Community policing/safety	Religious/moral
Domestic violence	Resources (trees, firewood)
Economic recovery/livelihoods	Retaliation (in camp and across the border)
Ethnically fuelled conflict/ethnic discrimination	Romantic relationships/marriage
Farming/crops	Sexual exploitation/rape
Food security	Sport and games
Fraud and irregular use of funds	Suicide
Gender and identity	Taboo (cultural)
Gossip	Theft
Governance	The prioritisation approach (WFP food assistance)
Health-care conflict	Transactional sex
Host–refugee conflict	Trauma
Legislation	Water/access
Missing persons	Witchcraft
Murder and violence	

Figure 3:
Key actors

Categories of key actors	
Camp governance (OPM and DRS)	National local governance (LC)
Church groups and leaders	National NGOs (NNGOs)
Community Associations	Police and security groups
DRC	Refugees from other nationalities
Elected Refugee Leaders (RWC, block leaders)	RLOs
Health care organisations and actors	South Sudanese ethnic groups
Host Community Kenya	Tribal leaders, courts and councils
Host community Uganda	UNHCR
International NGOs (INGOs)	World Food Programme (WFP)

3.2. Displacement of South Sudanese

For the past half-century, most people in what is now South Sudan have suffered from drought, floods, famine, and war. The many periods of armed conflict have left few lives untouched, and in addition to the massive death tolls, millions of people have been displaced into neighbouring countries. By the end of 2024, approximately 4,400,000 people were forcibly displaced from their homes in South Sudan, and approximately 2,270,000 of these have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Of these, 43% (1,060,550) are hosted in Uganda and 8.5% (220,589) in Kenya (UNHCR 2025d, 6).

3.3. Governing refugees

Rhino Camp (Uganda) and Kalobeyei (Kenya) are formally defined as 'settlements' in which inhabitants are meant to enjoy a greater degree of freedom than in more traditional 'camps' such as Kakuma. Despite differences in terminology, all three locations share characteristics that would fall under 'camps' in the literature on humanitarian spaces (Gidron 2022, 8). This is also the term used by people inhabiting these places, which is why we will refer to all three locations as 'camps' or 'camp-based settings' henceforward.

In last year's annual findings report (2024), we unfolded the complex patchwork of actors and institutions that govern, administer, and keep order in the three camps, including the formal authorities and security-providers, the elected refugee-leadership structure, the 'customary' or 'ethnic' leaders and courts, the local churches, refugee associations and organizations, UNHCR, and NGOs (Degett et al. 2024). To survive in these settings, one must continually navigate the structures and institutions they encompass, including the opportunities, challenges, and restrictions they present. While people do their best to manage conflicts and disputes and to find pragmatic solutions to the hardships and limited access to resources that the camps provide, the structures are currently under increased pressure due to reduced aid.

This chapter briefly outlines key contextual conditions in these camps that influence how refugees handle conflicts and engage in peaceful coexistence[5].

5 For a detailed introduction see the earlier published report (Degett et al. 2024).

3.4. Refugees in Uganda

Uganda's refugee laws are often portrayed as progressive global ideals for supporting refugees in pursuing self-reliance and a life beyond the settlements (Degett 2018). These ideals build on the formal framework described in the 2006 Refugee Act[6] and the 2010 Refugees Regulations,[7] which: 1) open Uganda's doors to asylum-seekers irrespective of their nationality; 2) grant refugees relative freedom of movement and the right to seek employment; and 3) allow each refugee family a small piece of land for their exclusive use.

In practice, however, the situation for refugees in Uganda includes multiple challenges. For instance, it seems very difficult for South Sudanese to obtain formal employment in Uganda, as they are underprioritized, even when they meet formal requirements (Kaiser 2006, 602; O'Callaghan 2018, 12; Kaiser 2007; Omata and Gidron 2025; Gidron 2025b)this article challenges characterisations of Uganda's UNHCR-supported refugee settlement system as un-problematically successful. It shows that by denying refugees freedom of movement, the settlement system undermines their socio-economic and other rights. Refugees who remain outside the formal system of refugee registration and settlement are deprived of the refugee status to which they are entitled under international law. The article questions the conventional opposition between refugees living in and out of refugee settlements in the Ugandan context, revealing a more complex and interconnected dynamic than is often assumed. It suggests that those refugees with some external support may be able to escape the confines of remote rural settlements, where refugee agricultural livelihoods are seriously compromised by distance from markets, unfavourable climatic conditions, exhausted soil and inadequate inputs. It argues that refugee livelihoods face more rather than fewer challenges as exile becomes protracted, and concludes that the government and UNHCR's Self Reliance Strategy (SRS. Moreover, they lack the opportunity to be naturalised as Ugandan citizens, and their access to aid is, for the most part, confined to isolated rural camp-based settings that offer very limited opportunities to obtain sustainable livelihoods, secure work permits, or participate in local businesses (ibid.). In practice, these challenges mean that most refugees in Uganda live on the margins of society, and because they are highly dependent on aid to cover their basic needs, they need to live their lives in the camp-based settings where it can be accessed (Degett 2018).

3.4.1. Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement

The research in Uganda is conducted in and around Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement, which has hosted refugees since 1980. The settlement is located on clan-owned land[8] and extends approximately 85km (Degett 2023; Degett and Whyte 2023). It takes about two and a half hours' drive on dirt roads to reach the nearest town, Arua. As of October 2025, 199,239 refugees and asylum-seekers live in Rhino Camp, of whom 93.29% (185,878) are South Sudanese; others are from DR Congo, Sudan, and Rwanda, with a small number from Burundi and Eritrea (OPM and UNHCR 2025).

Most of the South Sudanese arrived as part of the massive influx of 716,732 refugees who fled South Sudan between 2016 and 2017 (OIOS 2018, 1). A few South Sudanese had remained in the settlement since the previous armed conflicts preceding independence in 2011. Most of them have been phased out of food assistance since the early 2000s, when the majority of refugees returned to South Sudan following the peace agreement with Sudan. The settlement continues to receive new refugees, including people fleeing the hostilities in Sudan who arrive in Uganda via South Sudan. South Sudanese are granted refugee status on a prima facie basis in Uganda, meaning they are granted asylum upon arrival on the basis of their nationality (UNHCR 2011, 103).

Multiple ethnic groups from South Sudan inhabit Rhino Camp, and because the settlement receives new arrivals daily, their composition changes constantly. The largest zones are occupied by people arriving from the southern part of South Sudan, including Bari-speaking ethnic groups such as the Kakwa, Mundari, Kuku, Kelico, and Mundo.

6 See the 2006 Refugee Act in the UNHCR's overview of country-specific refugee legislation and treaties (Refworld 2006).
7 See the 2010 Refugee Regulations (Refworld 2010).
8 Land in this part of the West Nile area is held under customary tenure and owned by indigenous communities, administered through traditional governance methods, and passed on through ancestral lineages (O'Callaghan 2018, 20).

Rhino Camp also hosts a substantial number of refugees from the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, most of whom come from the more northern and eastern parts of South Sudan; the Nuer population in particular has grown in recent years. Most data are from extended cases in three zones of Rhino Camp, where the FAs are based: Ofua, Ocea, and Eden. These zones represent the diversity in the settlement in terms of ethnic groups, new arrivals, 'old caseloads', and different host-community interactions. In addition, the most important infrastructure is located here (hospitals, schools, and the reception centre for new arrivals) and the busiest markets and taxi platforms for trips to Arua, Koboko, Yei, or Juba. These zones also host most of the RLOs, community initiatives, and important people, including the highest-ranking refugee leaders (based on governance and cultural, religious, and ethnic identities).

3.4.2. Governance structures and security providers

Managed centrally out of the Prime Minister's Office in Kampala, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) manages the coordination of core services in Rhino Camp together with UNHCR. The OPM handles all matters relating to refugees, including the determination of refugee status, the allocation of land for refugees, and the coordination and management of refugee settlements. Rhino Camp Settlement is led by the OPM's Settlement Commandant and his office, which comprises a range of OPM programme staff linked to the relevant sectors of the humanitarian operations.

The local community governance structure in Uganda is divided into Local Councils (LCs) with a cabinet and a chairperson at each of five levels, from village to district. The LCs are elected by their communities to formally represent their interests. The LCI and LCII members are important figures in the surrounding areas of Rhino Camp, as they belong to clans that own the land on which the settlement is located.[9] In addition, the LCs often play an important role in handling conflicts between the refugees and members of the host community (often related to access to natural resources and intermarriage).

The Refugee Welfare Council's (RWC) governance structure mirrors that of the local community. The RWC structure and its chairpersons are vital for refugees' participation in decision-making and modalities for conflict prevention, mediation, and mitigation in Rhino Camp. The RWCs comprise elected refugee leaders who serve as formal intermediaries between the refugee community, on the one hand, and the Ugandan authorities and humanitarian actors, on the other. On several occasions during the research, RWCs explained their role as a field extension of OPM, representing the authorities, even though they are elected to represent the refugees. The RWC structure is also key to interactions between refugees and humanitarian actors; RWC members are typically invited to coordination and conflict mediation meetings. This division of governance seems to work more effectively compared to other camp settings, where refugees are not able or permitted to create forms of representation. However, the situation for refugees in Uganda is not always conflict-free, and sometimes alliances and rivalries exist across these institutions. Although no formal written regulations pertain to the RWCs' mandate (Gidron 2023), the RWCs are clearly perceived as having a mandate to resolve conflicts between refugees, between host-community and refugees and between refugees and local authorities or humanitarian actors. They handle a variety of conflicts in the camp and are often among the first actors to be notified when conflict is simmering or has fully erupted.

In Uganda, both formal security providers and community-led security groups exist. The Ugandan Police Force is the formal security provider in the settlement and provides formal access to the justice system. Its main base is in Yoro, with smaller police posts, with one or two officers, centrally located in the largest zones of the settlement. The police-to-population ratio in Rhino Camp is low (in 2024 it was 1:5000), and the scarcity of manpower means that many disputes are, in practice, handled by other mechanisms.

Rising crime has previously prompted the establishment of a community-led security group, known as the 'Security Vigilance Group', which patrols the camp. This initiative has received mixed reactions; although it has been shut down for shorter periods due to the sometimes violent methods of the group and the risk of power abuse, many refugees and humanitarian actors including OPM, UNHCR and NGOs, see this initiative as an effective way of bridging the gap between the limited police resources available and the high rise in robberies and thefts. In the other zones, the RWC cabinets include a security focal point who may or may not have a team conducting night patrols in specific situations.

9 It is not always the case that clan leaders are elected on to the local councils in Uganda, in contrast to South Sudan, where chiefs are recognized by national law councils (Leonardi and Santschi 2016, 15).

3.5. Refugees in Kenya

With the introduction of the new Refugee Act in 2021,[10] Kenya took various steps to shift its refugee management policy away from security concerns toward one more aligned with Uganda's approach. This provided refugees with better mobility options and ambitions for financial inclusion within the host community and for self-reliance. These developments led to the Shirika Plan - which translates from Kiswahili as 'Coming Together' - a national policy plan that seeks to convert all camps into 'integrated settlements' with a focus on self-reliance, improved inclusion in the local economy, and inclusion in national services side by side with the host community (UNHCR 2023; Government of Kenya and UNHCR 2023). It was launched in March 2025, amid severe reductions in humanitarian financing (Nyale 2025). The plan has been widely debated and criticised for insufficient consultations with both Kenyan and refugee communities, as well as the local government in Turkana (Hovil et al. 2023, 44; Bol 2024). In Kakuma, protests erupted in March 2025, as refugees demonstrated their opposition to differentiated assistance and the Shirika Plan, while demanding basic services and food. It is relevant to note that in Turkana, where Kakuma and Kalobeyei are located, food insecurity is high, and the discrepancy in aid provision for hosts and refugees could contribute to creating resentment toward refugees (WBG 2024, 43).

3.5.1. Kakuma and Kalobeyei

Kakuma camp opened in 1992 as a response to the large influx of refugees from the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). Currently (October 2025), the camp hosts 225,625 refugees from approximately twenty different nations. The majority (57.3% - 129,181) are still South Sudanese, but other groups have arrived in large numbers from Somalia, DR Congo, Sudan, Burundi, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, and a few groups from Afghanistan, Syria, and West African countries (UNHCR 2025c). Kakuma is located in Turkana County, in the northwestern corner of Kenya, bordering South Sudan and Uganda. Traditionally, the Turkana are pastoralists, and they share ways of life (including food, marriage negotiations, 'conflict settlement fees', etc.) with the majority of South Sudanese in the camp, such as the Dinka, Nuer, Didinga, Toposa and Anuak, who are also pastoralists. The relationship between the Turkana community and the inhabitants of the camp has been a popular topic of research for decades (Ohta 2005; Jansen and de Bruijne 2020; Jansen 2016; Rodgers 2021; Pincock et al. 2021) and is described as dynamic and complex, as host communities benefit from the political and financial focus, infrastructure, and opportunities associated with the refugee camps (ibid.).

Currently, 80,380 people live in Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, only one-third of the number of people living in Kakuma. The majority (72.7% - 58,403) of the population in Kalobeyei are South Sudanese (UNHCR 2025c). The land on which Kalobeyei is located was formally handed over by the Turkana County Government in 2015 and developed in line with Kenya's commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), with the Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan (KISEDP) moving into its second phase (2023-2027) (UNHCR 2023). The difference between Kakuma and Kalobeyei is striking, even to the untrained eye. Kakuma is an overcrowded settlement hosting four times the population it is designed to accommodate (UNHCR 2025b); it consists of narrow dirt paths leading into packed marketplaces and residential compounds. Kalobeyei is more spacious and is structured along a tarmac road. Both Kakuma and Kalobeyei are, in practice, divided according to nationalities and ethnicities. Our main focus is three South Sudanese communities in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, namely the Anuak, Dinka, and Nuer, which are among the largest ethnic groups. The research is based in the specific areas where they live, mainly Kalobeyei Village 1 and 2, and Kakuma 3 and 4.

10 See the 2021 Refugee Act (Refworld 2021).

PARTOCA field assistants from Rhino Camp conducting fieldwork among refugees in Juba who recently arrived from Uganda @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

3.5.2. Governance structures and security providers

Refugees in Kenya are the responsibility of the DRS under the national government at the operational level and the Ministry of Interior at the strategic level (Hovil et al. 2023). Like the OPM in Uganda, the DRS is assisted by UNHCR in managing refugees. The Camp Manager is the on-site representative of DRS in the two camps, who oversees all issues relating to the refugees. In contrast to Uganda, the refugee governance system does not mirror that of the formal Kenyan administration. Since 2011, the refugee leadership structure has consisted of a block management committee, a zone management committee, and a camp management committee (UNHCR 2025a), which is therefore much younger than the one in Uganda, which has been in place for decades. Formally, the block management committees consist of ten members: two elected block leaders and one representative from each of the eight sectoral committees in the block. These cover different sectors, such as 'Peace and Security'. In practice, the responsibilities of the block leaders include resolving minor conflicts, such as those unfolding in water queues.

The formal refugee leadership structure in Kalobeyei was introduced in the Kalobeyei Constitution adopted in 2019 and comprises community-elected representatives at the compound, neighbourhood, and village levels, the leadership of both neighbourhood and village levels consisting of a chairman and a chairwoman (UNHCR 2025a). According to the constitution, this refugee leadership structure acts as a link between the residents in Kalobeyei and the Kenyan authorities and humanitarian partners in the camp. In contrast to the RWC structure in Rhino Camp, which is led by the OPM, the mandate of the elected refugee leadership in Kakuma and Kalobeyei is not as extensive as that of Rhino Camp, and our data suggest that at times coordination between key coordination actors, including international stakeholders, and the elected refugee leadership can be challenging. Neither Kakuma nor Kalobeyei has an overall leadership representative corresponding to the RWCIII, which limits their inclusion and influence on the decision-making process at the highest levels, such as in Uganda, where refugees, through the RWCIII, are represented in the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF).

The Kenyan police service, led by the police commander, is formally responsible for law and order in the camp. They have several specialist units, some of which operate in the camps. Another key stakeholder security body is the Kenya Police Reserve (KPR), an armed auxiliary force operating in rural areas of Kenya, including the camps (Brankamp 2020); according to our data, they mostly deal with host-refugee conflicts. The final key official security stakeholder is the CPPTs, a community policing initiative managed by the DRS. The CPPT officers are themselves refugees and receive an incentive salary for their work. They primarily function as an extension of the police, working closely with other security stakeholders and authorities within the camp. In practice, according to our data, CPPT officers handle conflicts and disputes, patrol the camp, and report crime cases to the police.

The CPPTs constitutes a hybrid between a community and formal initiative. Their presence in the camp appears to have led to fewer informal community security groups in Kakuma and Kalobeyei than in Rhino Camp. One customary group did have a community security initiative, patrolling the settlements night and day. They handle civil cases while reporting more serious crimes to the police. However, as in Uganda, the initiative was divisive: although their support for patrolling the settlement was appreciated, they sometimes crossed the line in their methods of detaining or punishing perceived perpetrators. In Kenya, the consequences appear more severe, as the security initiative was effectively shut down last year and has not been permitted to restart despite the growing need following changes in conflict dynamics after the aid cuts (see chapters 6 & 7).

3.6. Refugee registration

When refugees arrive in Kenya and Uganda, they must be registered to receive services and food rations. Usually, refugees are registered at transit centres near the border and transported to reception centres in camps and settlements, where they remain while undergoing the full registration process. The registration process includes the government collecting biometric data, such as fingerprints, from arriving individuals.

In Uganda, this approach was introduced in 2018 (UNHCR 2018). Here, the OPM (see section on Governance Structures) is responsible for issuing Refugee Family Attestations on arrival, often referred to as the 'attestation card'. This document is used to access services in the camp. Family members are usually registered on the same attestation card, and a larger family size on the card increases the amount of food or cash received. Children must be registered with an adult aged 18 or older. Family members can be added to the card later, for instance, if one member remained in South Sudan while the rest of the family fled, but joined the family later. However, this is often a lengthy process. When a family is phased out of the food assistance, it concerns the entire family, including the children, registered on the attestation card.

The process in Kenya is similar. The Kenyan Government's DRS, with support from UNHCR, is responsible for the reception, registration, and issuance of documentation for refugees, including the refugee identity card used to access services. In Kenya, the biometric registration system was implemented in the late 2000s by UNHCR (Gitahi 2024).

Because of the biometric registration system, it is not formally possible for refugees to be registered more than once, and they are not allowed to transfer their registration to another country. Refugees from Kenya and Uganda rarely de-register when they leave their country of asylum and tend to use more informal routes when travelling to South Sudan to avoid being reported as returning (voluntary repatriation), which would remove them from their UNHCR registration and exclude them from the food log. Most people prefer to remain registered with UNHCR so they can more easily return, and others can collect their food rations while they are away. When leaving the camp for shorter or longer periods, such as to travel to South Sudan, refugees usually leave their card with their relatives.

Market in Kakuma Refugee Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

4. Changing contexts

In this chapter, we describe elements in the two main research locations that have been affected by the reduction in humanitarian assistance. We primarily focus on food assistance, while briefly addressing healthcare and education. Food assistance, healthcare, and education are core services and of central importance for refugees' lives in asylum. Substantial reductions in these services affect refugees' coping practices and the types of conflicts they experience. Cuts in food assistance also affect refugees' access to healthcare and educational services. Because food rations are either paid in cash or in food items that can be sold, cuts to these rations reduce funds for healthcare and education. Both the healthcare and education sectors are severely affected by the withdrawal of aid, as these sectors have traditionally been supported by major international donors, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

4.1. Consequences for food assistance

In Uganda, funding for food assistance has decreased since 2020 when the 'prioritisation' approach was introduced. This entails reducing food assistance by prioritising the most vulnerable according to categorised vulnerability (Brown and Torre 2024). Since March 2025, due to reductions in aid, the most vulnerable refugees (category 1) have received 40% of the defined full ration. Moderately vulnerable refugees (category 2) have received 22%, and the least vulnerable, the majority (category 3), have been phased out of assistance (WFP 2025a). These are the lowest rations provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) in East Africa. In May 2025, WFP reduced the number of refugees receiving aid from 1.6 million to 662,000, with half receiving cash transfers and half receiving in-kind food. The only exception to the strict cut-downs is the new arrivals who receive 60 per cent rations for the first three months of their stay while they undergo their assessment into the categories (WFP 2025d). According to our data, as of October 2025, 40% of the food ration in Rhino camp is equivalent to 18,000 Ugandan Shillings (UGX) per month (5.15 US Dollars), while 22% is equivalent to 10,000 UGX per month (2.86 USD).

As of September 2025, the majority of refugees in camps in Uganda are reported to be food insecure: 63 % moderately and 7 % of them severely so, with worsening needs amongst new arrivals, persons with disabilities, children at risk, and people struggling with mental health issues (REACH 2025; WFP 2025a, 7). Access to food assistance in Rhino Camp is scarcer than in Kakuma, and the per-person food allocation is smaller. Yet, in Rhino camp, options for farming are, to some degree, possible for most families, although it is rarely enough to sustain the needs of a household. Three household heads from the larger cohort we are following under the PARTOCA portfolio in Kalobeyei and Kakuma have moved to Uganda in recent months, under the radar of the authorities, to seek better income opportunities. All of them, however, were disappointed by the options and conditions they met in Uganda and returned to Kenya after a short period. One of them is a young man, Stephen. A few days after his return in September, the research team met him and a couple of his male friends. One of them said, laughing:

"He struggled here, but in Uganda, he met fire! So he came back."

Years after the introduction of the prioritization approach in Uganda, the camps in Kenya followed suit in 2025. They are still experiencing a number of challenges, such as misclassification.

"I go to [the reception centre] for people to help me [share their hot meals]. Because I don't have anything and I can't get anything…."

says Jacob, a father of six children and blind. Jacob is one among many refugees in Kenya who share concerns about the new prioritised food assistance. It is widely known in the camp that people with severe disabilities are supposed to be placed on food assistance (category 1), but like many others, Jacob has been misclassified into the wrong category (see also Bakewell et al. 2025).

By August, 69% of the refugee population in Dadaab, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei received food assistance (WFP 2025b). The most vulnerable (category 1) received 40% of the Minimum Food Basket (MFB) (WFP 2025b), and the moderately vulnerable (category 2) received 20%. Categories 3 and 4 have been phased out in practice, although Category 3 may occasionally receive food (NRG 2025, 3).

In Kakuma, WFP provides food assistance in the form of in-kind food distributions. According to our data, as of November 2025, the 40 % food ration for category 1 in Kakuma is supplemented with Kenyan Shilling (KES) 375 (2.90 USD) per month, while the 20 % food ration for category 2 is supplemented with KES 430 (3.33 USD) per month. In November, category 3 households in Kakuma received KES 530 (4.10 USD) but no in-kind food; this was considered an extraordinary ration and will not be provided continuously. In Kalobeyei, there is no food distribution. People receive vouchers, 'bamba chakula', which can be exchanged for food items in certain shops. According to our data, as of November 2025, 40% of the food ration in Kalobeyei is equivalent to KES 1460 (11.31 USD), while 20% is equivalent to KES 915 (7.08 USD). In November 2025, households in category 3 received KES 530 (4.10 USD).

In line with the introduction of the Shirika Plan and building on KISEDP, residents in Kalobeyei receive cash through vouchers, whereas residents in Kakuma primarily receive in-kind food. While the provisions remain well below basic survival needs, food assistance increased slightly by the end of the year, and more people were transitioned to a cash modality (NRG 2025, 3–4; WFP 2025c). Yet, malnutrition rates are rising (WFP 2025b, 1). The introduction of the prioritisation approach has heightened tensions within households and between households and relatives, and has spurred widespread protests. In Kalobeyei, the protests intensified in July, underscoring the mounting frustration as refugees face dwindling access to essential services (WFP 2025b, 1). As mentioned in the section on governance structures, Uganda's RWC structure often detects and mitigates simmering conflicts and protests before they escalate into violence. The absence of such structures in the Kenyan camps may increase the risk of such deadly protests.

In South Sudan, food assistance for returnees is largely absent. Some food assistance is provided for people in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, the so-called POC camps, but subject to a decrease. In an interview from August 2025, the Chairperson of Juba IDP Camps expressed deep concern about the lack of food aid in the camps; he stated that no humanitarian organisation was providing food aid at that time (Juba Witness 2025). According to our interviews with refugees conducted since 2022, those who have no immediate network upon return and need assistance during the first days and weeks are often hosted in churches and supported, on an ad hoc basis, with food by relatives or charities. In Mangateen IDP camp, which hosts many returnees from Kakuma and Rhino Camp, a large warehouse building serves as a temporary shelter, but humanitarian actors only provide ad hoc services occasionally. A report from 2023 shows that a high proportion of returnees to Juba practice crisis or emergency food coping strategies, with 69% of the population reporting a crisis level of food insecurity according to the Reduced Food Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) (REF and Samuel Hall 2023, 50).

4.2. Consequences for healthcare

Some of the most serious consequences of the aid cuts in the South Sudan crisis will be poorer health outcomes over time, especially for children under five years (Halakhe 2025, 9; NRG 2025; REACH 2025; WFP 2025a). In all camps and settlements, health care services are free in principle but, in practice, require payment for transport, for medicines not in stock, and sometimes for special services. With the recent cuts, health care services across camps in Uganda and Kenya have been reduced as staff have been laid off, health clinics have closed, and outreach activities have been reduced (WFP 2025b; NRG 2025; Halakhe 2025; UNCHR 2025).

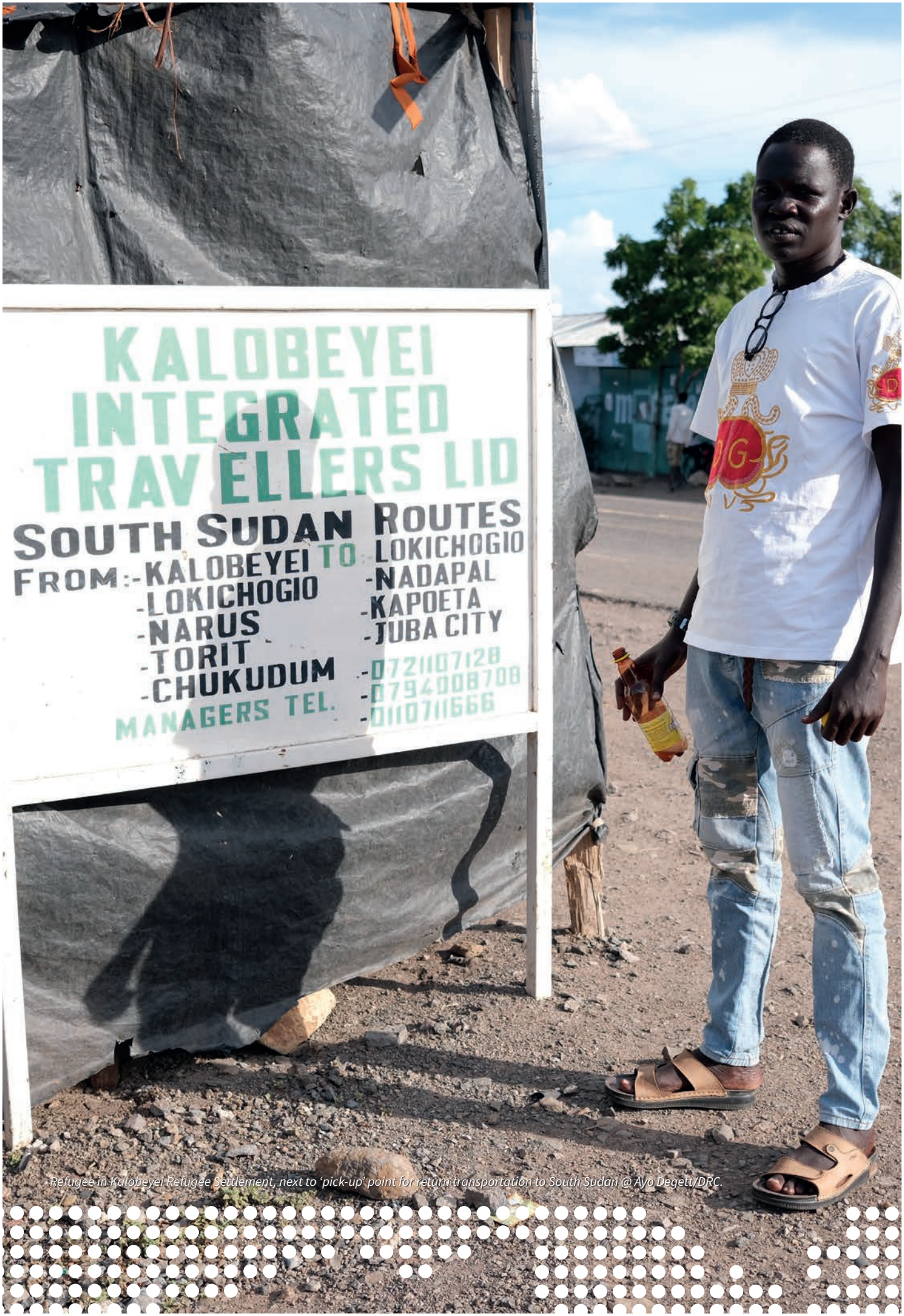
Increased distances to health facilities and reduced access to life-saving medicine are changes that directly affect chronically ill persons in the camps and settlements. Twice over the past months, antiretrovirals (ARVs) have been temporarily out of stock in Rhino Camp, and health personnel report late referral leading to maternal deaths. The reduction in health services is also relevant to the effects of conflict. Services for gender-based violence (GBV), child protection, and community protection information have been scaled down drastically since the aid reductions, while there is a rise in cases (NRG 2025, 5–8; REACH 2025; WFP 2025a, 10–11).

4.3. Consequences for education

Access to education is of immense importance for South Sudanese youth as it enables a hope for the future, despite an often traumatic past and an extraordinarily difficult present (REF and Samuel Hall 2023, 29). Cuts to education aid are reducing the quality of schooling and increasing costs to learners' families. Parents and learners across camp settings assert that education for children and youth is a high priority (Omata and Gidron 2025, 113). Under current financial circumstances, if an opportunity for paid work should appear for young people, dwindling resources may force refugees to make life-altering choices to survive, including dropping out of school (NRG 2025; WFP 2025a, 6, 18; WBG 2024, 31, 34). As we show below, the cost of education is an element in coping practices. Removing children from school reduces costs. If a schoolgirl is married off, families may expect the added benefit of receiving bridewealth.

Education sector partners estimate that close to 400,000 refugee learners in Uganda will be directly impacted by the aid cutbacks (REACH 2025, 6). Because education programmes that fund teachers across all settlements have been affected, the Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) is likely to deteriorate. The PTR was estimated to have increased from 86:1 to as high as 117:1 as of December 2025. In addition, programmes that supply school materials, provide financial support, and support vulnerable children have been affected, while child protection programmes have also been impacted (ibid.).

In Kenya, immediately after the abrupt loss of USAID funding for teachers, subsidised lunches, learning materials, and related costs, the education of 150,000 refugee learners was affected (Halakhe 2025, 11). According to the NGO Refugee Group (NRG), teacher numbers and learning materials have reduced by 23 % in secondary education after the aid cut. Classrooms are overcrowded, and attendance is declining (NRG 2025, 7).



Refugee in Kalobeyei Refugee Settlement, next to 'pick-up' point for return transportation to South Sudan @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

5. Conditions for coping

The changing context sets overall challenges. In this chapter, we present the conditions for addressing these challenges. By conditions, we mean the available possibilities for action. For simplicity, we distinguish the possibilities for coping while staying in place from those that moving makes available.

5.1. Staying in place

The reduction in humanitarian funding has affected everyone in the camps, with many refugees entirely phased out of the food assistance; one million have been phased out of food assistance in Uganda alone, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) (OCHA 2025). Those who stay in the camps despite these challenges are finding ways to cope with the current conditions. In this section, we describe some of the most common coping practices, comparing conditions in Kenya and Uganda. The report is not intended to provide a comprehensive mapping and analysis of all coping practices; we have decided to focus on coping practices that have been adjusted following the aid cuts, and that affect the conflict dynamics of the camps, either directly triggering conflicts or leading to potential conflict escalation.

5.1.1. Casual labour

Informal casual labour, known as *leja-leja,* is widespread among refugees in both Kenya and Uganda. In this section, we outline the types of casual labour that appear most common in the wake of the aid cuts and the differences, as we see them, between Kenya and Uganda.

Because of the freedom of movement in Uganda, it is more common for refugees to engage in casual labour for both other refugees and local Ugandans. Casual work on small-scale farms is commonly undertaken by both men and women. Beyond farming, casual work among male refugees is often quite different from that among female refugees. Women often engage in domestic tasks in both Ugandan and refugee households and small businesses, including washing and ironing clothes, cleaning, and preparing food. Men often do casual work outside the home. This includes small-scale construction work such as digging latrines and rainwater ditches, constructing mud or mudbrick walls, herding goats, or driving a motorcycle taxi (boda-boda) on a day-to-day basis with the motorcycle owner. At times, we see conflicts when agreements are not honoured, reflecting how the current economic circumstances make refugees more vulnerable to exploitation.

Over the past eight years, during the period when the PARTOCA team collected data, the dynamics of casual labour and cash-for-work interventions by humanitarian actors have played a vital role in employment in the settlement. At one point, DRC in Rhino Camp had over 500 casual workers, including so-called incentive workers, who worked for a daily or monthly incentive constructing houses for Persons with Special Needs (PSN), clearing bush for construction sites, digging drainage canals, preparing hot meals in the reception centre, off-loading food supplies and non-food items, etc. With reduced funding, programmes are scaled back, and so are the jobs supporting them. Currently, DRC employs 37 incentive workers.

Overall, the tendencies in Kakuma and Kalobeyei are similar to those in Rhino Camp: people attempt to diversify their income strategies, but each avenue for income is volatile and uncertain, and many compete for the same opportunities. We have identified three main differences in the data from the cohort of households followed and long-term engagement in the camps. First and foremost, mobility restrictions mean that out-of-camp day labour is more limited in Kenya. Secondly, climate conditions mean there are very few opportunities for casual labour on farms in the area around Kakuma and Kalobeyei, compared with Uganda.

Thirdly, in the Kenyan camps, the inhabitants come from a much broader range of national and cultural backgrounds, and the markets are generally larger and more vibrant. Some residents of the camp appear to have greater access to income and remittances than others, creating opportunities for casual labour. For instance, in Kakuma, many South Sudanese engage in housework for Somali families.

It is important to note the social dimensions of certain forms of casual work across different South Sudanese ethnic groups in the settlements. For many married women, it is not socially acceptable to engage in casual public work, especially in the evenings. This might reflect poorly on the husband, who would be subjected to degrading comments if his wife were seen washing dishes at the food joints. These types of work are therefore mostly undertaken by unmarried, divorced, or widowed women. Along the same lines, it would reflect poorly on both men and women to engage in casual work, which is well below their educational level. However, such ideals may be challenged, both as a result of the dire economic situation, but also because people are exposed to values and ideals that may challenge their traditional ones, potentially spurring tensions across generations or gender (see also Ensor 2014, 2013).

5.1.2. Farming and kitchen gardening

Rhino Camp is surrounded by fertile farmland and is primarily populated by refugees with farming experience. For the inhabitants here, arrangements with local landowners are a common way to make ends meet as food assistance is being phased out. Formal agreements were introduced to mitigate conflicts arising from the existing lending and leasing agreements between refugees and landowners. Yet this approach is not free of conflict and requires robust community structures and attentive camp management to avoid clashes. These include conflicts arising from livestock destroying garden crops and from land-leasing agreements between host community members and refugees. Though many refugees benefit from land renting agreements with the host community, there have been instances of the land agreement being 'withdrawn' after the land was cleared and ready for planting, as well as instances of double renting, such as one RWC leader explains:

> "(...) this time the food was reduced. Everyone wants to dig. But some people, these hosts here, are not good…That land will be [rented to] 3 people. Then, when they come to the issues, the landlord will not be there. It is people who have rented the land [who] will now have a problem."

Other misunderstandings arise because land may be owned in common by multiple relatives under customary tenure. However, in some instances, a landholder is trying to collect money from several refugees. Furthermore, as the need for food and the demand for land rental increase, so do conflicts related to these. For some households, access to land for cultivation is difficult. As food rations are cut, land rent has increased, and some households simply cannot afford to pay for land use, while others cannot farm due to chronic health conditions. Furthermore, it appears more difficult for newcomers with weaker social networks to reach agreements with locals and neighbours regarding access to land for cultivation, which may, in turn, spur conflict.

In Kenya, farming activities are limited due to the climate - the area is semi-arid and prone to drought and floods - as well as legislation. The refugee legislation and encampment model restricts refugees from engaging in occupations reserved for the host community (such as collecting firewood, agriculture, and pastoralist activities). Therefore, refugees generally cannot engage in agriculture, with the exception of small kitchen gardens (WBG 2024, 52). In Kalobeyei, there are greenhouses, but previously, inhabitants had their crops stolen, which discouraged farming.

Regarding the social aspects of farming as an income opportunity, it is also important to note that most South Sudanese in Rhino Camp are from groups socially and ethnically related to the host communities. In practice, this means that most people speak similar languages, and the communication on 'deals' for land use is therefore easier than in Kakuma. Furthermore, the majority of refugees are accustomed to farming and regard it as their primary food source, whereas in Kakuma, most refugees are traditionally pastoralists with less attention to farming. In

addition, many of the refugees in Rhino Camp have a long-term relationship with the particular villages and community leaders in the sub-counties, as they have been refugees in these settlements before, and many adults in Rhino Camp have 'grown up' with these neighbours; some have even gone to school with them during the last armed conflict in the 1990s. Finally, during the armed conflict in West Nile after the fall of Amin (late 1980s), many Ugandan residents in and around Rhino Camp lived as refugees in South Sudan, where they were supported with farmland, shelter, and food by the same families and clans who now inhabit Rhino Camp (see Harrell-Bond 1986). Many in the older generation, whether they fled or stayed behind, share a sense of gratitude and reciprocity from those years, which eases the farmland transactions.

5.1.3. Livestock and herding

In Uganda, it is legal to rear livestock within settlements, and people keep chickens, ducks, goats and sometimes pigs. While it is legal to keep cows, the town-like environment in Rhino Camp and the space available in 10x10-meter homesteads are unsuitable for keeping cattle. The pastoralists in Rhino Camp rarely bring cows from South Sudan, they prefer to keep their herds with extended family members back home. A few households keep cows, and in Odubo Zone, on the outskirts of Rhino Camp, there is a joint community-led cattle-herding initiative, developed by six extended families from the Dinka and Nuer communities since the early 1990s, in collaboration with local landowners. Years back, keeping goats was common in some parts of the camp with some access to grazing or fields. Yet over the past couple of years, as socio-economic conditions in the surrounding villages have declined, goats have become a popular target of theft, resulting in frequent conflicts. Because of the high risks involved and the general decline in income, goats have become a rare sight.

In Kenya, keeping livestock in the camps is forbidden. People are allowed to rear chickens, and though it is uncommon, several RLOs in Kakuma do so. There are obviously always exceptions to the rules, and a few courageous individuals bypass them and keep cattle or goats in their compounds, but generally this is not a common source of income or food. Livestock are often a source of conflict in Rhino camp - both when livestock is missing and stolen, and when livestock destroys crops. This is rarely the case in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, as keeping livestock is prohibited and therefore rare, and, since farming is not possible, there are no conflicts over the destruction of crops. As mentioned in last year's report, conflicts can arise when refugees purchase a goat for slaughter without realising that the goat had been stolen (Degett et al. 2024); however, this is also rare, as most cannot afford goats.

Women selling tomatoes, onions and charcoal before sunset in Kakuma Refugee Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

5.1.4. Regular income, salaried work, and business

There are only a few options for formalised employment for refugees in Kenya and Uganda. While it is easier for South Sudanese refugees to obtain employment in Uganda than in Kenya, Uganda's high unemployment rate makes competition very tough. Even nationals report that one must pay a bribe or have connections to obtain employment. For many jobs, it is necessary to show papers (such as school certificates), and specific work permits may be required (UK Aid and U-learn 2025, 13). Therefore, most refugees are not employed: in Kakuma, for instance, 7% of women are employed compared to 14% of men (WBG 2024, 45).

One of the most significant providers of more regular work is humanitarian actors. They have three overall ways of engaging refugees for paid work. As described above, they hire unskilled labour on a day-to-day basis, but they also offer more regular agreements for refugees with specific skills and qualifications, who receive a monthly payment, the so-called incentive worker agreements. These jobs include social work at the community level (primarily provided by the humanitarian actor responsible for protection), outreach healthcare volunteers (primarily provided by healthcare providers), enumerators (often provided by UNHCR or NGOs), interpreters, and water monitoring teams. However, these positions in humanitarian organisations are also precarious (WBG 2024, 6), and they have been affected by the aid reduction, which broadly impacts the humanitarian sector. As the sector has been a major economic driver in the refugee-hosting regions generally, current reductions have broad impacts. In Uganda, cuts in the humanitarian sector have led to job losses and weakened cash flow. This affects businesses dependent on refugee and aid worker spending (WFP 2025a, 6). As a result, local markets are shrinking, housing demand has declined, and informal labour wages are falling due to increased competition.

Some South Sudanese have a regular income from self-owned, small or large businesses, or from more regular work than that listed in the section above on casual labour. For Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Rhino Camp, regular income jobs include work in the informal service sector within the settlements, the informal transport sector and restaurants. We classify these as more regular income opportunities because, although most drivers rent their motorcycles, many do so on a regular basis. Some shops, makeshift movie theatres, and roadside restaurants employ staff who regard their work as more than casual labour. Staff in these businesses are paid daily, but their engagement is long-term. An average salary for such jobs is about 3,000 UGX per day (90,000 UGX per month, approximately 25 USD).

Small-scale reselling of commodities and food is common in both camp settings, even at the micro level. If you go to an area one kilometre from the main market, someone is often selling onions or popcorn at a slightly higher price than at the main market, earning a few cents. This type of 'petty trade' is often practised by women; however, it is a precarious livelihood strategy as it rarely leads to the accumulation of funds or stability (Gidron 2025a, 6). Those engaged in petty trade compete with many others selling the same goods and rely on the limited purchasing power of other refugees (ibid.).

5.1.5. Remittances, loans, and begging

Some refugees in Kenya and Uganda are fortunate to receive remittances from family members and friends. Our data indicate that remittances play an important role in camp life and, perhaps most notably, among refugees in urban areas. These remittances are not provided regularly, and the amounts are small but significant for the recipients. Almost all the remittances mentioned by interlocutors come from relatives in South Sudan or within the same country (e.g. a brother working in a factory in Torrit or Mbale), whereas monetary support from relatives in the global North is rare. In a recent study of refugees in a settlement in Adjumani District, 41% of the 500+ respondents interviewed reported receiving remittances from relatives in South Sudan over the past year (Omata and Gidron 2025). Yet, according to our findings, there appears to be a blurred line between remittances and loans: some support is provided on the condition that it be repaid, even though the recipient and the lender may know the likelihood of repayment is slim. Such ambiguous exchanges can be a source of conflict in contexts of resource scarcity.

One of the most frequently reported coping strategies currently is accumulating debt. Some members of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) take loans that they cannot repay, leading to internal conflicts. Others take loans from food shops until their options are exhausted. Refugees also take high-interest loans from 'wealthy' individuals in the camp who function as moneylenders. In interviews with people departing, high debt in the camp, combined with the lack of a prospect of ever clearing it, is recorded as one of the main reasons for returning to South Sudan. At one police post in Kalobeyei, officers also confirmed this issue:

"They run with the credit, they go with the debt [to South Sudan]. They eat two years ahead of the money." Eric, a young man with diabetes and difficulties walking, explains how he lives from credit at the local shops once his food rations are over: "My food will last for 15 days. For the next 15 days, I go to the owner of the shop. I tell him: Just give me this one, afterwards my money will come, you can just write down. I just borrow."

Although he is placed in Category 2, the cash he receives (equivalent to 5 USD), cannot take him through a full month. Yet, due to his difficulties walking, it is hard for him to engage in alternative livelihood activities to diversify his income. When asked what he does when shop owners deny him more credit, he says he goes to the neighbours for meals.

Another income-generating practice is asking for favours and loans from relatives. For instance, James, a 19-year-old secondary student in Kalobeyei, requested that his relatives in South Sudan sell a cow to pay for the return transport of his late brother's wife, promising to repay the money in the future. Among the poorest families in our data, public begging is becoming a more frequent practice. Begging, borrowing, and asking for favours from relatives is a shortsighted strategy that could undermine one's position within a social network over the long term and exacerbate tensions among intimate others. In some instances, these debt-related dynamics lead to prolonged internal conflicts.

5.1.6. Realizing assets and consolidating households

When aid was reduced, Emily, a woman in her thirties, decided to leave her plot to move to a different area of Rhino Camp where she could obtain land for farming. She put the house that she lived in for sale. Before she left, Joyce, a mother of a disabled child, asked her if they could live in the house until a buyer was found, and Emily agreed. However, one day, relatives of Emily abruptly took over the house, and Joyce had no other option than to move into a poorly constructed house with a leaky roof in her estranged husband's compound.

Refugees sell - or attempt to sell - their houses and other assets for several reasons. One reason, as described by Joyce in April 2025, is to relocate to an area of the camp where opportunities, such as farming options, are perceived to be better. Despite being against the rules set by the camp management, selling houses or plots is a common coping practice, however, rarely free of conflict. Some who have good houses or attractive locations rent them to others. Some sell their houses because they are in desperate need of money and move into others' households. Merging households (and selling duplicate household items) is increasingly common, as it provides immediate cash. Selling one's house can also be a means of funding the return journey to South Sudan or relocation to other settlements. These strategies are relatively shortsighted and risk exacerbating intra-household conflict dynamics due to overcrowded living.

5.1.7. Forced marriage and child labour

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (CEFM) is linked with economic hardship as well as cultural practices and is often arranged by the girl's family as a strategy to alleviate financial burdens (Concina et al. 2024, 64). Our data shows that in Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Rhino Camp, girls and young women are typically forced into marriage with older men in exchange for bridewealth when they visit - or are tricked or coerced into going to - South Sudan. Since early 2025, interlocutors have reported an increase in early and forced marriage as an indirect effect of pressure on the household economy.

It is illegal in both Uganda and Kenya to engage in a sexual relationship with girls under 18 years of age and it can lead to many years in prison. Comparing the practice of the law in the two refugee contexts, it seems to be more emphasised in Uganda, which means that women often travel back to South Sudan for marriage, even when both parties live in Rhino Camp. This was the case last year when a 15-year-old woman was forcefully married to a much older man living in the same zone. Although the girl tried her best to escape, extended family members dragged her to South Sudan, as an agreement of the marriage had already been made, and bridewealth changed hands. Forced marriage often leads to conflict between the woman and her relatives, but the conflict can extend to her community at large.

In Kakuma, a recent study shows that 52% of South Sudanese girls are married before turning 18 and 9% before the age of 15 (Concina et al. 2024, 66). By comparison, among Kenyan nationals, 23% are married before turning 18, while 4% are married before the age of 15. Early marriage often leads to early pregnancies, which present a barrier to accessing education and result in girls dropping out of school (Concina et al. 2024, 64–65). Similarly, when boys attending secondary school are

responsible for impregnating a girl, they sometimes also drop out of school to flee from punishment or, in some instances, find work to support the girl and child (ibid.)[11]. We expect to see the same tendencies in Rhino Camp. In addition, the reduction in aid may lead to increased child labour and youth dropping out of school to support their families. This is also a short-sighted strategy, as a lack of education may limit their future livelihood opportunities, leading to further impoverishment.

5.1.8. Theft and other crimes

Since the reduction in aid and food assistance at the beginning of 2025, community members report a sharp rise in theft and other crimes; however, due to limited police resources, many of these incidents are not formally recorded. According to our data, these cases range from minor ones – such as children stealing food – to larger cases of organized theft and robbery by gangs. The example of Ayak in the Introduction illustrates the desperate situation many people face, risking their lives for a handful of beans. In Kakuma, the CPPTs has recorded an increase in theft and robbery since the reductions in aid. A case reported in October read:

> "South Sudanese man reports unknown people came to his house at night with pangas. They broke down his door, entered, and took 35 kg rice, 5L cooking oil, and 1 phone".

This is a typical case reported to the CPPTs; however, oftentimes the perpetrators are unknown, and no arrest is made. At one of the police posts in Kalobeyei, officers likewise noted an increase in these cases, reporting that as of October 2025, they received approximately five theft and robbery reports per day. One year earlier (around October 2024, before aid reductions), theft and robbery cases were reported approximately once a week. In our data from 2025, thefts of phones and food items are most prevalent in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, whereas theft of livestock and motorcycles is most widespread in Rhino Camp.

Other minor irregularities within this category include attempts to manipulate the systems for distributions of food and other resources. Some households in Rhino Camp who were removed from food assistance during the recent budget cuts are attempting to re-register some household members. It is not possible to be double-registered as an adult due to the biometric identification system. For children under the age of five, biometric data are difficult to capture within the system. A facial recognition system is being rolled out. Therefore, in an attempt to cope with their dire situation, some refugee households enter into agreements with host community members, who attempt to register as the head of the household in exchange for a favour or the sharing of food items received. These agreements are unofficial, which makes them fragile, as the person registered as 'head of the family' can withdraw, sparking conflict. The increase in crime significantly impacts trust among refugees and between refugees and hosts, affecting social cohesion and opportunities for improved relationship-building between the two neighbouring groups (WBG 2024).

Transactional sex is also becoming increasingly widespread. Although hidden behind moral directives and taboos, it is clear that it is the cause of many of the conflicts the teams have explored. In addition, the team is also following people who are engaging in sex work, and they report a rise in brothels and a rise in risky behaviour as negotiating condom-use becomes more difficult, the more desperate you are to feed your children and dependents. Suicide and suicide attempts are also commonly reported in our data. According to the refugee leaders who keep track of the suicide rates, it reflects the desperation of providers who struggle to feed their children after being cut off from the food rations. In Uganda, as opposed to Kenya, suicide attempts are a criminal offence, and survivors who fail their attempts risk being arrested by the police if they are not able to flee the scene, which has been reported in several cases. The above-mentioned crimes and situations sometimes lead to conflict. Sex work, in particular, can lead to alleged adultery accusations and often be more harmful to the victim than the client or offender, as portrayed in the ASPIRE report from 2024.

11 The COVID-19 pandemic – and following lockdown of the schools – led to an explosion in teenage pregnancies. For instance, in Kakuma before the pandemic in 2019, eight cases of teenage pregnancy were reported for the month of June compared to 62 pregnancies during the same month the following year (Partridge-Hicks 2020). Monthly increase in teenage pregnancies has already been recorded in one health facility in Kalobeyei visited by the research team in October 2025 (20-30 teenage mother deliveries in May and 55 in September).

5.2. Mobility

In this section, we outline the coping possibilities that moving makes available. The mobility patterns of camp-based refugees in Kenya and Uganda are important aspects of coping practices in the current funding crisis. Because the legislation governing movement differs substantially between Kenya and Uganda, one would expect to observe very different trends across the groups observed and interviewed in the study. Yet interviews and engagement over the past months indicate that the two groups share several key mobility patterns: refugees in both countries mostly leave the camp due to distress caused by reductions in food aid or when in need of medical treatment. Decisions about 'when' and 'who' should move and 'where to' may cause friction among close relatives and extended kin networks. This section of the report is divided into three thematic areas of mobility: movements to urban areas, movements within and between camps, return mobility, and 'U-turn movements'.

5.2.1. Movements to urban areas

For many refugees in Rhino Camp, moving to nearby urban areas such as Arua, the district capital, occurs only when a person or family members require treatment and access to healthcare, or can afford secondary education outside the camp. As many refugees are unskilled, with limited social capital, networks, education, and finances, urban areas rarely offer many good income options. A recently published brief on camp-based refugees' mobility to nearby urban areas in two similar refugee settlements in Uganda (Kyangwali and Pagirinya) shares the same overall findings based on 645 interviews with refugees. While most research on mobility focuses on urban areas, entrepreneurship and mobile livelihoods strategies, those truly leveraging on their freedom of movement into towns are refugees with financial resources and a network of support upon which they can build their lives and income opportunities (Gidron 2025a, 1).

We observe these characteristics in our data from Rhino Camp as well. Either refugees move to town to survive, including for health conditions that require frequent hospital visits. This involves staying in Arua at the mercy of extended family members and collecting their food distributions in the settlement, if they are still on the food log. Or they have an established network in Arua prior to arrival and resources to run a small business, such as operating a motorcycle taxi or owning a small shop. With no exception, all households followed on ASPIRE (and other projects) keep their refugee registration open, although most of them have been placed in category 3 (phased out of food), and only a few households are therefore still receiving food rations.

In comparison with the large number of refugees in the settlement, only a few people move to urban areas. Generally, those residing in the camps are too poor to manage the conditions in urban and peri-urban areas. Several low-income members of the study cohort are able to remain in Arua only because others are hosting them. Few refugees in Rhino Camp have this option, and even in smaller towns and peri-urban areas closer to the settlement, refugees would need to pay rent to settle there. For poor households, which are expected to increase as food assistance is phased out, living rent-free in the camp, with subsistence farming options, appears to be the best option under these dire conditions. All in all, according to our data and multiple Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Arua-based residents, there might be a slight increase in young people trying to find work and income in Arua, but for the large majority, movements to urban areas outside of the settlement are rare, and seldom linked to income-generating activities, similar to the findings from Kyangwali and Pagirinya (Gidron 2025a, 2).

In Kenya, the research team follows four households on the outskirts of Nairobi. Due to current legislation, refugees in urban areas are few and less mobile. Several of these households are still on the food log in Kakuma, indicating that they have self-settled in Nairobi, and others are likely collecting their rations in Kakuma on their behalf. In contrast to Uganda, most of the refugees we have engaged with in Nairobi receive remittances from relatives abroad and supplement these with small-scale business activities. The poorest households in Nairobi receive charity from churches in addition to remittances. Both Nairobi and Kampala, as well as the closest towns to the settlements (Arua and Lodwar), host South Sudanese students from the settlement on scholarships, which often include a small stipend to cover essential living expenses. The few refugees in Rhino Camp who can afford private education for their children send their children to boarding schools and work hard to save money for the fees.

5.2.2. Movements within - and between - camps

The most common movement recorded in the data is mobility within the camps. As described above, it is common for families to merge households to reduce expenses and obtain immediate cash by selling duplicate household items. The movements are determined by the social networks available within and around the camps. If you have been phased out of food rations and your siblings or in-laws have better access to food, income, services, or fertile soil for farming in another part of the camp or settlement, it is likely that you will move there in times of precarity.

In Uganda, it is common for refugees to move between the camps if they have family members or relatives who can support or host them. These movements tend to occur more on the basis of needs and survival than as a strategy for income generation. Yet it is important to note that food rations are assigned to the formal place of residence. If you choose to self-settle in Adjumani or Bidibidi while registered to live in Rhino Camp, you will need to travel long distances to obtain food assistance if you are on the food log. In previous years, the cost and inconvenience of transport related to food distribution would deter people from undertaking these internal movements. With far fewer people receiving food assistance, individuals appear to be self-settling with less hesitation, and several areas of Rhino Camp have become empty.

In Uganda, some refugees with larger networks relocate to areas with soil and weather conditions more conducive to farming. In the interviews in Rhino Camp, we have engaged with refugees who have friends and family members who rent farm plots in Obongi, Bweyale, and Bushia. These instances are few. Among the households we follow, they are not moving their families to these locations. They go to the farm for a few months and return to the camp with the produce for eating and selling.

Some leave to seek opportunities in camps in other hosting countries. Rose, a South Sudanese refugee in her forties, is seated in her house, surrounded by her household members, during the research team's visit in October 2025. Her sole source of income is the sale of minor food items, such as onions, salt, and oil, which she stores in a bucket. For Rose, it is not an option to return to South Sudan, but after being placed in category 3 (removed from food assistance), she needs to move out of Kakuma to survive:

"When the aid cut happened, I decided that my business is not helping, it is not satisfying the needs of my house[hold]. I decided to sell this house to someone else, but I did not get any buyers. So, I decided to remove the [iron] sheet [roof] of this room and then the other room, all rooms in the compound, to sell them as iron sheets. I got around 300 or 200 US dollars in total so that the family can travel to Uganda (…) to work because there, people cultivate."

Rose has 12 dependents in her household and expects that transport to Uganda will cost approximately USD 500. Rose could be characterised with the popular term 'onward mover', someone who moves onwards to a third country, if staying and returning are both exhausted as options in their opinion. The 'onward movers' from Kenya into Uganda are few, but they exist[12].

5.2.3. Return mobility

Returning to South Sudan can be risky, due to both the general instability in the country and the trip itself. Despite the risks involved, in 2025, UNHCR recorded the return of some South Sudanese refugees to South Sudan. According to UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), approximately 103,709 South Sudanese crossed into South Sudan between January and August 2025. However, based on interviews and the peer researchers' observations at border points, people use numerous informal routes to cross the border (to avoid being registered as returnees); the number of returnees is therefore likely much higher.

Across the interviews, the primary driver of return is reported to be the limited access to food and income. The people we engaged with in 2025 are not leaving because they have ambitions to pursue entrepreneurship, engage in specific income-generating activities, or establish profitable businesses. Most people who decide to return at this time are doing so because they see no other options for survival in the camps. Many families say they will return to their rural homes if security allows and plan to support themselves through subsistence

12 Due to the biometric registration system with UNHCR, as explained above, it is not formally possible to be registered more than once, and you cannot move your registration to a different country. The only exception is in case of third country resettlement which is very rare. We have followed a few households and individuals from Rhino Camp and Kakuma who have been resettled in European countries, Canada, and the US over the past eight years. While chances of getting resettlement in western countries are very limited following the political developments in the US and Europe, the previously resettled families play an important role in terms of sending remittances.

farming. Some young people interviewed engage in 'split-return' (Harpviken 2014, 57; REF and Samuel Hall 2023, 5), which involves travelling to a larger town, such as Juba, and seeking low-wage *leja-leja* (casual work) to send remittances to family members left in the camp. In these instances, those who depend on camp services, particularly education and healthcare, remain behind and hope to receive economic support from those who have returned. These patterns are also seen in Omata and Gidron's study of return movements by refugees from Pagirinya and Kyangwali (Omata and Gidron 2025). In line with their observations from two different refugee camps in Uganda, our data from Kenya and Uganda suggest that South Sudanese at this point in time mostly engage in 'survivalist mobility' or 'distress migration', rather than having a strategy for income (Gidron 2025b; Omata and Gidron 2025; REF and Samuel Hall 2023; WFP 2025a).

5.2.4. 'U-turn' movements

In contrast to the movement patterns of most South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma, many refugees from the Ugandan settlements often go back and forth to South Sudan. These types of movements are locally referred to as 'U-turns'. Other scholars studying South Sudanese return mobility have described similar tendencies in return patterns as circular or fluid (Omata and Gidron 2025; Vlassenroot et al. 2020; Leonardi and Santschi 2016). A primary reason these shorter trips are possible is that many inhabitants of Rhino Camp are originally from South Sudanese villages and towns bordering Uganda. In contrast to most refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, whose villages are located many days (or weeks) of travel away in South Sudan, many refugees in Uganda can board a vehicle in Rhino Camp in the morning and arrive at their village or urban area by evening the same day.

This situation is not unique to Uganda. In a recent study from Gambella, Ethiopia, a refugee leader explained:

> "The economic situations here in the camp make refugees move from one camp to another and from Ethiopia to South Sudan and again, back to Ethiopia..."

(REF and Samuel Hall 2023, 28). As argued above, this pendular approach is not necessarily motivated by aspirations for better living conditions but rather by survival options. Rather than returning with the intention of remaining permanently in South Sudan or the country of asylum, people evaluate their limited options and decide to go where conditions appear slightly more bearable for the time being. As explained by an interlocutor in the aforementioned study, many South Sudanese keep one leg in South Sudan and one in Uganda for safety reasons.

It is clear from discussions with refugees in Uganda that some of the 'U-turn' movements are exploratory visits in which family heads return to assess the options available for a decent life at home, including the state of their farmland, their cattle, and the level of insecurity. In addition, people seek information about the state of affairs at home from relatives based there, over the phone. Social media is also a popular channel for gathering information about events and home security levels. The rumour-tracker mentioned in the 2023 report (Degett and Whyte 2023) is an initiative by an RLO to map rumours of security events in South Sudan. Refugees in Rhino Camp who want to verify the validity of information on social media or from relatives can enter (or call in) the key information. Over the following days, the teams from the RLO in South Sudan will do their best to triangulate the information with their sources in the relevant locations and confirm its accuracy. This information is used actively by many refugees interviewed in Uganda. Yet another method reported in the data is simply monitoring the returning vehicles at the border. Drivers are aware of any recent roadside robberies or security concerns, as they have just passed the same roads. Information on the conditions for return figures in refugees' considerations and decisions on whether to leave the camps, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Market in Kakuma Refugee Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

6. Subjectivity under new horizons

Refugees face narrowing horizons for navigating their daily lives. In this chapter, we focus on subjectivity to show how refugees attempt to steer through current, strained conditions. With the concept of subjectivity, we want to highlight how refugees are subjects in the double sense of being both subject to conditions and authors of actions.

Initially, we acknowledge the uncertainty that pervades subjectivity. Refugees are under pressure from rapidly shifting conditions that they neither control nor fully understand. The changing conditions to which they are subject evoke uncertainty (see also, Horst and Grabska 2015, 5). It is uncertain how food rations will fluctuate, whether they can manage in the camp, where they know people and have a house, or whether the best option is to leave and seek opportunities outside the camp. Refugees address uncertainty by trying options to see what works, by gathering information from others, and, most importantly, by adjusting relationships with intimate others. Subjectivity is not purely individual; actors are embedded in relations with intimate others: family, friends, and neighbours, whose intentions, resources, and dispositions shape the possibilities and actions of individuals.

This chapter begins by examining the importance of such kin and neighbour relations, which can constrain and create possibilities, and are prone to conflict under current conditions. The second part of the chapter examines people's considerations about whether to remain in the camp or move in search of survival, with an eye to the tensions and conflicts that their actions evoke.

6.1. Kinship relations

When subjects act and make decisions - on whether to stay in the camps or move, on how to limit already modest expenses or generate income - kinship relations and obligations often play a pivotal role. People do not act solely on their own behalf, but with a view to their dependents, relatives, caregivers, or their wider kinship network. Because these relations are so intimate and fundamental, they are often the first to be affected by coping attempts and are frequently the primary locus of conflict.

"I was shocked because for me, I finished my secondary in 2022, and for me I was expecting him to take me to university. I was expecting my father to take me to university, but instead of taking me to school, he tried to betray me and give me to a man in [exchange for] money."

Alice, a 22-year-old woman, went back to South Sudan in April this year to visit her mother and father. However, while she was there, her father and uncles arranged for her to marry a 50-year-old man without informing her or her mother. One day, Alice's mother was told by a friend that Alice had been 'given a man'. Alice was shocked when her mother told her; she felt betrayed that her father had decided to marry her off rather than support her education. Her mother advised her to find a way to return to Kenya because otherwise she would be forced to marry the man. Fortunately, Alice had some savings, and her mother had some money from her own small business. She managed to escape before the wedding; however, the bridewealth consisting of 100 cows, had already been paid and distributed among her uncles. Her father continues to assure the man that although Alice has gone to Kenya, she will return, and that some of her father's relatives recently went to Kalobeyei to persuade her to return to South Sudan. Alice reports them to the police when they come to the camp, which usually

discourages them. Her plan is to attend school and earn enough money so that one day she can repay the bridewealth to the man and 'be free'. Alice believes that paying back the bridewealth might improve her relationship with her father;

> "but it will also bring conflict because it is a taboo in my community to return the cows. If they give, they are already given. You can't do anything".

We have seen many cases of forced marriage in our data, both within the camps and in South Sudan, and often it is a strategy for coping with economic hardship (see also Ensor 2014, 20). Organisations based in Kenya reported an increase in child marriages during 2025 (NRG 2025, 14–15). As the situation in the camps in Uganda and Kenya – and back in South Sudan – becomes more difficult over time, such cases are likely to increase. These coping practices often bring conflict, sometimes within families or between communities, as we saw in last year's report with the case of Rose (Degett et al. 2024, 48–49). The power and authority of older men are evident in their arrangements of marriages and the exchange of bridewealth. In times of precarity, the ability to secure substantial payments for a daughter's marriage is particularly significant. For Alice, there was some possibility of negotiation, mainly because she does not depend on her parents; she holds an incentive position in a humanitarian organisation and works in a market shop. Yet, her situation with her family in South Sudan is precarious, and she does not consider finding a partner an option, as it could place that person in danger. Alice's case illustrates how displacement affects gender roles and women's positions, which, in turn, may spark conflicts across genders and generations (see also Ensor 2014). It is relevant to note that while cases of forced, early, or child marriages may rise, protective measures to handle such cases have diminished across camp settings (NRG 2025, 5; REACH 2025, 6; WFP 2025a, 10–11). We return to this point in chapter 7.

Homestead of people with specific protection needs in Kakuma Refugee Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

In South Sudanese societies, kinship relations extend beyond immediate families; clanship is important for mutual support, which can also give rise to conflict.

Mid-morning, John arrives at Samuel's home carrying tools. John and Samuel, both from the same clan, had agreed that John would pay 50,000 shillings in small amounts over time in exchange for using Samuel's plot to build a shop. Over the past year, John had only managed to pay 10,000 shillings. Recently, John was placed in category 4, and therefore no longer receives food assistance. Facing this difficult situation, he decides to dismantle the shop to sell materials. Approaching the structure of the shop, John says, "I need to take this. I've been put in Category 4. I can't feed myself anymore." Samuel, visibly upset, blocks the shop entrance and says firmly, "You didn't finish paying. You can't take what you don't own." John reminds Samuel that they had agreed to a flexible payment plan and that he had already paid 10,000 shillings. Samuel counters that since the full amount has not been paid, the shop now belongs to him in compensation. Unable to convince Samuel, John reports the matter to DRS. A few days later, both men are summoned to a meeting regarding the matter; the decision ultimately favours Samuel, as John had failed to complete the payment. John was sitting quietly outside, visibly distressed, saying, "They say I'm self-reliant, but there's no food, no income. This shop was all I had." Samuel, though satisfied with the decision, was feeling sad it had come to this: "I helped him because we are from the same people, but he broke our trust."

While John's agreement with his fellow clan member, Samuel, initially offered him the possibility of earning income, he abandoned the idea of opening a shop after the onset of food shortages. Ultimately, this decision left John in a vulnerable position: he lost the shop, was unable to sell the materials, and damaged his relationship with a clan member who had helped him. Although he had long-term aspirations for his shop, he found that there was no alternative to prioritising his immediate survival. In this way, attempts to cope with the conditions can put clanship, on which one otherwise depends deeply, under pressure.

Turning now to refugees' reflections about the possibilities of staying or leaving, we will see that embeddedness in relations with intimate others figures prominently in their considerations.

6.2. Mobility considerations

"The future is not promised. Even tomorrow is not promised. You wake up knowing that I don't even know what I will eat today or tomorrow. (…) I've never dreamt of going back to the country [South Sudan] because the same people that took away [killed] my father and my uncle back in the years are the same people that will just be haunting me day and night if I go back to South Sudan. So, I was just making myself start to make a foundation here so that I make Kakuma home for me, because I don't have any future outside Kakuma, to be sincere."

Simon, in his late twenties, reflects on whether to leave the camp or remain. Like many people we have engaged with in 2025 (and previously), Simon does not consider it safe to return to South Sudan. Instead, he sees making a home in Kakuma as a possibility; he is married, has children, and luckily found an incentive position with a humanitarian organisation. At the same time, Simon's description, clarifies that life – and future life – in the camp is marked by uncertainty. Even the near future is uncertain, especially regarding where the next meal will come from. Paul, who is in his mid-forties and lives in Kakuma, expressed similar concerns in an interview in October 2025:

"For those who are remaining here [in Kakuma], there is no choice: you don't have transport to go back, and you don't have food to save your life here in the camp. You just struggle with your neighbour, with your relatives. But it is not good at all."

Many refugees express their desire to return to South Sudan *someday*, when there is peace. Coping for them becomes waiting. Waiting as such is not passive (see also Horst and Grabska 2015). Among the refugees staying in the camps, waiting also means they must find ways to survive in the camp and 'struggle', as Paul puts it. For Paul and many others, struggling entails begging, borrowing money, and asking relatives and neighbours for favours, such as meals. This is a shortsighted strategy that could undermine one's position within a social network over the long term. In some instances, these debt-related dynamics lead to prolonged internal conflicts.

Staying in place and struggling with neighbours and relatives is difficult, but so is the alternative. The dilemma that Paul and many others face is clear: while camp life is becoming increasingly difficult due to food insecurity, returning poses additional problems. First, the journey is expensive, and people struggle to afford the higher fares for formal taxis, which cost approximately USD 100 per adult (including bribes at roadblocks and police checkpoints). Secondly, the journey entails significant risks.[13] For Paul, these risks came close recently when a family member experienced that her children were kidnapped on the journey, a few hours into South Sudan. This happened to three other households interviewed, and a taxi driver in Kakuma confirmed the same incidents in an interview. Vehicles travelling to South Sudan from both Kenya and Uganda report frequent robberies. The experience of others who have tried to return informs Paul's decision to stay – at least for now.

Decisions about returning to South Sudan, relocating to other camps, or staying are shaped by the past and the present, and by what people, as subjects, consider possible. Many do not consider it safe to return to South Sudan. People draw on experiences with war and loss from the past, as well as recent accounts from neighbours and relatives who experienced robberies or kidnappings on the road. Others return to South Sudan for longer or shorter periods, or with the intention to leave the camp permanently. As other research has shown, returns are often fluid, circular, or gradual (Omata and Gidron 2025; Vlassenroot et al. 2020; Leonardi and Santschi 2016; REF and Samuel Hall 2023, 29).

There are many reasons for leaving; some add to conflict dynamics in the camp. A tendency we observed across the 108 conflict cases from this year is that some leave the camp due to accumulated debt, combined with no prospect of clearing it. In Kakuma and Kalobeyei, in particular, many refugees repeatedly take loans from food shops, eventually exhausting all their options. Leaving the camp and returning to South Sudan serves as a strategy for escaping responsibilities and debt, as well as for avoiding conflict. This, however, also puts those left behind in a precarious situation: both the shop owners whose loans will never be repaid and the relatives of those who left, who are sometimes required - or pressured - to settle the debt. It also complicates the possibility of returning to the camp in the future, as one would also then return to the conflict and unpaid debt.

It is generally common to 'keep one foot' in the camp even when planning to leave permanently. Refugees do this by keeping their food ration card active to prevent deactivation in the system. This can create conflict among remaining household members and relatives still in the camp:

When Nyabeel decided to return to South Sudan to look for income opportunities, she left her food ration card behind. Although her plan was to leave Rhino Camp permanently, Nyabeel wanted to ensure that the card would not be deactivated, so she could still receive food if she had to return to the camp in the future. The only member of her household who remained in Rhino Camp was a 16-year-old boy, Maku, a distant relative and one of the ten dependents listed on Nyabeel's card, because he had been staying with her until his mother recently arrived in Rhino Camp. After Nyabeel left, her co-wife, Elizabeth, was placed in category three, whereas Nyabeel's card remained in category two. Elizabeth felt a sense of ownership over Nyabeel's card and took it, although it had been left for Maku.

13 As part of the ASPIRE project, the research team tracks safety incidents in South Sudan, via an RLO that keeps online records of recorded clashes and safety incidents. Data in the database confirm the rise in kidnapping of children in these areas, which are hit by extreme poverty and armed actors desperate for income. According to the extended families interviewed, these children are sold and traded to work in the fields or with household tasks.

During the next distribution, Elizabeth took the money corresponding with a household of ten and gave Maku 40,000 shillings for a household of one. Maku was hesitant to accept this amount because, since moving to his mother's house in a different zone, he had spent a total of 30,000 shillings on transportation to the food distribution. Maku's mother was furious when he returned home with the small amount, and she accompanied him to the next distribution to confront Elizabeth. At the food distribution site, Maku suggested dividing the ration between them: he would take six rations, leaving five for Elizabeth. Elizabeth felt insulted, "You are a fool. You have no ownership over this card. It belongs to me! Me and this woman in this card share a husband and you are just a child under our responsibility; I will only give you three people, including you!" As they could not reach an agreement, the case was taken to the RWC. Ultimately, the RWC advised them to share as a family and, upon discovering that Maku's mother was in category 1, asked them to give Elizabeth seven rations, a solution that everyone was satisfied with.

Nyabeel returned to South Sudan with her children to look for livelihood opportunities. She ensured that her food ration card remained active so that she could continue to receive some support, but primarily, this was a way of keeping the option of returning to Rhino Camp open. Meanwhile, as the situation in Rhino Camp worsened, the ration card became a source of conflict for Nyabeel's relatives.

Generally, there is a strong social norm among many South Sudanese ethnic groups that requires sharing food. We have seen numerous instances of neighbours and relatives sharing the limited food available. This was also described by Alex, a young man in Kakuma who is physically disabled and uses a wheelchair:

> "Once you get a category one, let's say within [the] family, we can share. We understand. But to your neighbours also, you cannot eat alone while your neighbour is having nothing (...) So when I bring it [the food rations] home, I distribute it, because I cannot eat alone."

Despite his vulnerability and limited livelihood opportunities, Alex, like many other South Sudanese, feels a strong responsibility to share his food ration with his relatives and neighbours. It is culturally inappropriate - or even taboo - to turn down neighbours and relatives (especially children) who come to one's compound looking for a meal. Yet in some cases, such as the one involving Nyabeel's ration card, it sparked conflict among relatives over who was entitled to which amount of rations. Ultimately, the RWC reasoned with them, arguing that they should share as a family and noting that Elizabeth was perhaps most in need, since she had been phased out of food support entirely. Leaving can change conflict dynamics in the camp, suddenly bringing alliances and relationships into question.

Young women in Kakuma Refugee Camp practicing their catwalk as they pursue modelling as an income opportunity @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

7. Adjusted endeavours for peace

The current coping practices among refugees lead to changes in conflict patterns, as illustrated in the previous chapter. In this chapter, we will investigate how institutions, organisations, and community groups handling conflicts have been affected by the aid cuts, and how the changed coping practices of refugees have influenced conflict-handling efforts and the endeavours for peace undertaken by groups and individuals. With 'endeavours' we refer to the ways in which refugees manage their lives and improve their life situations by directing their efforts towards what is important to them. We focus on peace endeavours at the immediate level of individuals, families, and communities to explore the various ways in which refugees engage with conflict and with institutions that address it under changed conditions.

7.1. Reduction of security and peacebuilding actors

Santina, a 20-year-old woman, has a child with a man who, one day, told her that he would no longer support her or the child. Instead, he wanted to marry another woman, 15-year-old Yai. The two women had had disagreements about this man over a longer period, and this development escalated the issue. Santina went to confront Yai, and they ended up in a physical fight, where both sustained minor injuries. After the fight, Yai's mother, who happened to be the Women Representative of the zone, wanted the case to be handled by the court of elders; the chairperson representing the County in South Sudan, where both women are from, was supposed to hear the case. However, as the chairperson had recently been placed in category 3 following the aid cuts, he told them that he was busy struggling to get food for his children and asked them to go to the police instead. The next day, Yai's mother decided to go to an NGO help desk to request intervention from a protection caseworker; however, staff had been reduced, and the few remaining caseworkers cover multiple zones of the camp and are therefore not always available. For the next week, Yai and her mother attempted several times to go to the police station to resolve the case, but their statements could not be taken because no interpreters would come without payment. Ultimately, Yai's mother made a young man employed by an NGO interpret, as he had a regular income. The case, however, has not yet been mediated, and finding interpreters may continue to pose a challenge.

The reductions in humanitarian aid have affected almost all actors, organisations, and institutions available to address conflicts in the camps. In last year's report, we explored how refugees navigate the complex landscape of institutions and organisations managing conflicts. The above case illustrates how this navigation has become more difficult, as most conflict-handling mechanisms are challenged by current conditions. The elders are facing hardships themselves due to reductions in aid and must prioritise livelihoods and Income-Generating Activities (IGA); humanitarian protection programmes have been reduced, and at the police station, there is a shortage of interpreters. The case between the two women is still ongoing, and if it is not mediated in time, there is a risk that the conflict may escalate between the families of the women.

Since last year, we have observed significant changes in the landscape of actors engaged

in conflict management in the camps due to reductions in funding. Programmes by humanitarian actors have been heavily reduced in both locations. DRC's peacebuilding programme in Kakuma and Kalobeyei was deprioritised by donors. Across camp settings in Uganda and Kenya, organisations report that various protection services, such as legal aid, child protection, and gender-based violence responses, have been scaled down drastically, putting increasing pressure on remaining staff as there is simultaneously a rise in cases (NRG 2025, 5; REACH 2025, 6; WFP 2025a, 10–11).

Although most of the security actors in the camps know that there will be - and have already registered – an increase in some conflicts and negative coping mechanisms, including crime, due to the aid cuts, adjusting their endeavours to handle these incidents has been challenging because their capacity has also been affected by the aid cuts. As described in a previous section, the police-to-population ratio was already low in Rhino Camp last year, and it may have decreased further this year. We have seen a couple of examples of conflicts in which the police were called but were unable to attend. For instance, in a case early this year, a refugee was beaten to death after having stolen a chicken, but when the police were called, there was only one police officer at the police post, and therefore, he was unable to leave the post. We have documented similar incidents in which the police were unable to attend due to insufficient staff in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. In Kakuma and Kalobeyei, the CPPTs have also been affected. In one CPPT office visited in October 2025, the CPPT officers of the particular area in Kakuma were reduced from 43 to 14 due to the aid reductions. Some former CPPT members still come to the office and support their former colleagues on a volunteer basis, particularly when interpretation is needed. Before the aid reductions, one CPPT officer would work four times a month; now they have 12-14 duties per month (approximately seven night and seven day duties). Most days, only three CPPT officers are in the office to address the many complaints reported there, while the rest are in the field conducting patrols. As one officer describes:

> "The work is no longer serious (...) the work is not like the previous work we did. (...) It is very hard for us to perform our duty. We are not okay with it. The first thing in the camp is the security".

The lack of food has a significant impact on conflict dynamics: last month, when some people in category three received Bamba Chakula vouchers, the CPPT noted that tensions in the camp decreased slightly. Lack of food also drives much of the theft and robbery in the camp, according to the CPPTs.

The larger community conflicts and retaliation cases from South Sudan are especially challenging for the CPPTs to handle. When large groups of people are fighting, often using weapons like pangas (machetes), it is difficult for the unarmed CPPT officers to interfere:

> "You tell people 'don't go fight', yet you have nothing in your hand".

It was easier for them to stop these large-scale conflicts when there were many of them, and they could join forces with the community-led security initiative initiated by a customary group. While the CPPTs have been reduced in number, the customary community safety actors have been suspended, leaving the residents with few options for support if they are being robbed or attacked. The community-led security initiative used to patrol at night, but now they no longer operate, and after having been reduced in numbers, the CPPTs no longer patrol at night because "*people don't run from 14 people*", as one CPPT member put it.

While aid reductions have led to increased theft, they have also reduced the number of security actors in the camps. Over time, if developments continue, this significantly reduced safety net will have serious implications, as security actors may not be available to intervene in cases such as the one described in the introduction of this report, where the thief could have been beaten to death had the block leader and CPPTs not intervened.

7.2. Conflict handling by refugee leaders

More conflict handling may devolve to community structures and groups that are not directly affected by the aid cuts, as they largely operate on a volunteer basis. According to data on conflict-handling efforts collected by ASPIRE over the years (Degett and Whyte 2023; Degett et al. 2024), a strong community-based governance structure offers numerous advantages. Compared with our data in Rhino Camp, Kakuma and Kalobeyei have experienced more violent and deadly large-scale demonstrations and conflicts in recent years. Elected refugee leaders in Uganda are well-positioned to mitigate potentially deadly conflicts because they have the mandate to do so from the camp management and are trusted, supported, and recognised as an extension of the OPM. Therefore, elected refugee leaders in Rhino Camp can play a significant role in de-escalating conflicts before they reach the OPM. By contrast, in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, the mandate to govern and address even the smallest conflicts at the community level is unclear. For instance, the power dynamics and division of decision-making between CPPTs (who are paid staff under the DRS and are perceived as an extension of the police force) and the community-elected representatives are particularly tense.

Small-scale conflicts are increasing and becoming more complex as humanitarian funding declines, and many people resort to irregular activities to make ends meet. A recent conflict case from Kalobeyei in October 2025 provides a good insight into these dynamics. The neighbourhood and zonal leaders live in the areas they represent and monitor who lives where and who may have left the camp to seek opportunities elsewhere or to return to South Sudan. Currently, many people decide to sell all the properties in their house (including the roof) and move in with extended family members, using shared household items to benefit from a joint household economy. In this case, from October 2025, a neighbourhood leader explains how he intervened in a conflict that was about to escalate. A CPPT officer had identified a so-called 'PSN house' (a house built for Persons with Specific Needs) and determined it must have been abandoned, although it was in fact still in use. The officer had identified a new owner who moved in in exchange for an irregular fee. The original owner had not moved out, and, together with the community leader, they were able to find a solution, but, according to them, this type of challenge had become a general issue in the camp.

"If it was not [for] me, he [the CPPT officer] would have done a lot [of damage]. He's coming without even consulting the leader, especially in this area [prone to conflicts]. If he gets an empty house here, he will not even know whether the owner has gone to the hospital, the person has gone to Nairobi for a medical check, or for studies. He doesn't want to know, but he will put tape on it and label it [as belonging to] DRS, and later on, you will see him bringing someone. Taking money from that person."

Inhabitants of camps in Kenya and Uganda cope with changing life conditions in various ways. Sometimes these practices, such as leaving houses for more affordable living arrangements, create opportunities for other residents who eye a chance to resell houses to earn an income, as seen in this example with the CPPT officer, who is also a refugee. This is clearly in violation of the formal regulations and may lead to disputes. The composition of camp-based governance structures and the coordination between national refugee authorities and elected community leaders, such as the RWCs in Uganda, appear essential for addressing community challenges in the wake of aid cuts. While other coordinating actors, such as UNHCR, are retreating, the local structures persist. Supporting, capacity-building, and enforcing these structures are opportunities with great potential that are not costly but may require a mindset change towards a more localised governance structure.

In the face of the recent aid reductions, however, the RWC structure may also be affected. In several interviews, it has been stated that when resources are scarce, women prioritise their time differently, deprioritising voluntary leadership positions to focus on providing for their families. This affects

the gender diversity of the RWC structure, which is already challenged. There are many factors – institutional, cultural, and social – which hinder women's participation in the RWC structure (Naiga 2025). Women are typically responsible for children and the elderly, as well as for domestic work, leaving them overburdened and with limited time to engage in decision-making processes (Naiga 2025). Lack of female leaders will also potentially have consequences for the type of cases the RWC handles, as it may be difficult for women to seek support from male leaders for cases of GBV, forced marriage, and other sensitive issues.

At Rhino Camp, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei, the elected refugee leaders volunteer, and their positions are unpaid. Since the leaders are also refugees, those cut off from the food rations must focus on earning income through farming or business to support their families, leaving them with limited time to manage conflict cases and engage in peacebuilding. In some instances, the consequence is that leaders attend to a conflict only after it has already escalated. Some leaders are also leaving their positions, as one RWC leader explains:

"The structures are good structures, but the structures need sustainability. And these are some of the challenges that we have that are really threatening our sustainability. As we talk right now, there are many leaders who have given up. There are those ones who have stepped [down], there are those ones who have gone silently, resigned, and, ah, it is just because of the structures. We don't have transport. The support that is given to us is really not adequate. There is no proper support. Previously, we could be supported with secretarial only, we were given writing materials, and they could give us a bike, like a chairman. You are given a bike, but the bike which was given to me is not good, broken down. So, I just have to find my way. There is a conflict in Tika, I have to find my way, get some little money. If I have it, jump on a boda, then I rush."

The unofficial support for RWCs has reduced, threatening the structure. The RWCs' ability to handle and de-escalate conflicts before they blow up also depends on their physical presence at the site of the conflict. When leaders cannot afford transportation costs, this can hinder their ability to de-escalate conflicts in a timely manner.

Despite the challenges, many of the RWCs remain highly active and integral to conflict management in Rhino Camp. In mid-April 2025, the research team met with Isaac, an influential member of the RWC leadership with whom it has engaged over the past eight years. This corner of the settlement was one of the first places where an international NGO piloted so-called 'land leasing agreements', annual agreements specifying the cost and extent of the land lease as mentioned in chapter 5. We arranged this meeting with Isaac in response to a specific incident that occurred the day before.

A landowner had signed a large number of 'land leasing agreements' with refugees, but then moved to another part of the district. Shortly thereafter, a distant relative of the originally proclaimed landowner from Kampala appeared, claiming the land as his property. The refugees had therefore ended up in a precarious situation, having already paid the 'original' landowner and used their scarce resources to plant crops. Claiming not to have benefited from the leasing agreement, the Kampala-based landowner sought to take over the farmland, including the crops that were soon ready for harvest. Obviously, the refugees were furious, risking the loss of all their investments in this farmland. As an experienced negotiator and through effective collaboration with OPM and District authorities, Isaac secured an agreement allowing the refugees to harvest the crops they had already planted, on the condition that the leasing agreement would end after the harvest. During these negotiations, he arranged dialogue meetings with the refugee farmers involved and convinced them to remain patient while a common solution was negotiated among the sub-county, the refugee leadership, the Ugandan refugee authorities, and the District authorities. In Uganda, renting land is a common way of coping with aid cuts; however, this approach is not free of conflict and requires robust community structures and attentive camp management efforts to manage them.

Like the issue with the illegal re-selling of PSN houses in Kakuma, the current financial developments for refugees in Kenya and Uganda bring restrictions but also opportunities. The severe food insecurity faced by many households presents others with opportunities for income, as in the case of the distant relative in Kampala who saw an opportunity to reclaim farmland in time for harvest.

7.3. Elders, churches, and individuals

"The people in South Sudan put pressure to these people [in-laws in Kakuma]. But when I talk to them [in-laws in South Sudan], they seem okay, and they say 'no one should take away your wife'. That is the mother (…), my mother-in-law, who is in South Sudan. But when I come back here on the ground [in Kakuma], I have the uncles of the wife, I have the aunties of the wife, and the grandmom of the wife. They have their own perception, they have their own rules, and they have their own timing because even if I speak to my mother-in-law that I'm not in a position to pay this kind of thing right now, she would be like, she understood me. But when I come, when I come back here, the people on the ground, the people that I'm living with, will be like 'no no, but he is working, he is getting about 100 USD a month. That's a lot of money.'"

Simon, introduced in the previous chapter, lost his parents in the war in South Sudan and has grown up in Kakuma staying with a foster mother. When he was 19, his 16-year-old girlfriend got pregnant, and upon discovering this, his foster mother was disappointed and kicked Simon out of the house. Simon moved in with his friends, and his girlfriend also moved in with him. Soon, his in-laws began pressuring him to pay the bridewealth and threatened to take his girlfriend to South Sudan if he could not pay at least five cows. While the mother-in-law in South Sudan is more patient and understanding, the in-laws in Kakuma are less so, particularly because they know he has regular work with a humanitarian organisation. Simon struggled and took loans, enabling him to pay at least part of the bridewealth. However, he consistently fell behind, while also having to provide for his wife and children. Approximately a year ago, they returned the girl to her family in Kakuma. Back in South Sudan, Simon's grandfather's brother had initially promised that, once Simon's cousin married, some of her bridewealth could be used to provide Simon with a cow. However, because they were distant relatives, there was no obligation to give him a cow, and they ultimately withdrew their promise. Simon had no other relatives to turn to, and the unpaid bridewealth started creating conflict. There have been several meetings between Simon and his in-laws, facilitated by the elders and community leaders. However, the leaders cannot reduce the bridewealth. Instead:

"The elders and the community leaders (…) come together to buy you time, to lend you time so that you work out your things (…) Because when they come together to speak, the solution is that 'no, do not take the wife away from him. Please give him time. We are the witnesses. So, the next time you come (...) when the due time comes, and he is not in a position to do whatever we agreed. Okay, we'll give you the [mandate] to take the wife. But for now, please listen to me, let's settle and do not harm'. Because sometimes if I refuse them to take my wife away from me, the brothers will try to hunt me within the community that they want to beat me, and I have to be indoors or walk with a group of people, so that I'm not attacked. (...) So when we had the meeting, the brothers were there, the elders were there, and these people were told, like 'do not hunt down this guy. Let him work for his children, and that is when he will have something to contribute to the marriage' (...) Things cooled down. Now I can move from here to work, I can go anywhere without being chased or being attacked."

When the elders met with Simon's in-laws, they de-escalated the situation. Simon managed to get his wife back in his home, partly due to the intervention

of the elders and partly because her relatives were treating her poorly, which caused humanitarian protection workers to step in as well. The changed conditions are partially to blame for the immense pressure placed on Simon by his in-laws. Simon explains that the reason his wife's brothers are attempting to attack him is that once he pays the remaining balance, they will each receive part of the bridewealth. They hope that this money will improve their situation; some plan to return to South Sudan, while others plan to open their own businesses in Kakuma. Although the elders cannot reduce the amount Simon owes his in-laws, they can buy him more time, keep him safe in the meantime and maintain peace in the community. We consider this an endeavour for peace.

These endeavours are important in the current conditions where conflicts are on the rise. However, as the case presented at the beginning of the chapter highlights, customary courts and councils of elders have also been affected by the aid reductions, as some elders have been phased out of food assistance and therefore have to prioritise their own survival, focusing on IGAs rather than conflict resolution. In addition, some elders who previously played an important role in conflict mediation have recently returned to South Sudan, leaving a gap in their absence.

Church leaders and groups also engage in managing conflicts, either directly or in collaboration with other community structures. One example concerns two women, Grace and Aluel, who had been close friends since 2016. In August this year, a difficult conflict developed between them, sparked by a pig belonging to Grace's household that destroyed the cassava Aluel had cultivated around her home. Aluel is a single mother of twins, placed in category 1. Grace is a block leader. She rears pigs with her husband and is placed in category 3 (cut off food rations). The women would typically help one another and share meals. But upon realising that her cassava had been destroyed by one of Grace's pigs, Aluel insulted Grace and her husband in front of their child. Among other things, she accused Grace of wanting to harm Aluel's children out of envy because of the difference in food categorisation, and of coming to her home only for good meals.

As a block leader, Grace reported the incident to the vice block leader; however, insults and accusations continued. Days passed during which the women did not greet each other, and Grace decided to contact the RWC1 for mediation. While the mediation meeting was initially scheduled to take place at a women's safe house, the RWC1 decided to change the venue to the Baptist Church because, in his view, the insults and accusations made the case particularly sensitive. Four pastors were invited and showed up to facilitate the mediation. Although mediation initially made no progress, the RWC1 commented on the situation, reiterating that the two women could not accept reconciliation despite being in the presence of four pastors. He then threatened both women with physical, public punishment. At this point in the meeting, the women decided to reconcile. They were advised to resume sharing food, and the RWC promised to provide them with a chicken so they could share a meal. The pastors further advised them not to be jealous over food categorization and to refrain from insults, especially in front of children.

The case demonstrates that the destruction of vital crops provokes strong reactions and heated conflict. In Rhino Camp, crop destruction by animals is a common cause of conflict. Furthermore, it shows how actors well-versed in the social fabric of the camps, such as the RWC1, can engage and collaborate with other respected authorities to increase the likelihood of peaceful conflict resolution. Had the RWC not decided to engage with the Baptist church and its four pastors, the moral imperative to reconcile and forgive might have been weaker. Whether it was the presence of the four pastors, the RWC1's threat of physical punishment, or a combination of the two that led the women to reconcile remains unclear.

We have also observed other ways in which church congregations work to mitigate the impact of conflict. One example concerns Dalia, a single mother suffering from diabetes, hypertension, and paralysis. One day, her home was broken into. She did not know who broke in, but her hard-earned, modest savings from selling charcoal, along with vital household items, were stolen. Dalia could not see how she could recover what was lost. But upon hearing of the robbery, members from her church congregation paid her a visit, assuring that they would be there for her amid the challenges she was going through. In addition to the emotional support, they had collected 100,000 UGX to help Dalia restart her charcoal business and purchase some of the items that had been stolen from her. Deeply grateful for receiving support, Dalia explained how she had considered reporting the incident to the police. However, she did not know who had broken into her home, nor did she have money for transport to the police post. Furthermore, she did not expect that reporting the incident to the police would enable her to recover what she had lost. The church's offer of support seemed to heal the wounds of the robbery better. In contexts where humanitarian and

statutory actors addressing conflicts are reduced, religious institutions may increasingly become involved in endeavours for peace, as has been shown among refugees in urban hubs in Uganda (see also Lauterbach 2019).

Despite the dire conditions, individuals and small community-led groups also step in, to provide support where they can. This was also the case when, at the beginning of the year, Gloria, a refugee woman in Rhino Camp with six children, went to her neighbour's garden to steal cassava. Her husband is unemployed and often spends his time drinking alcohol. One day, Gloria's family had gone three days without a meal, and Gloria felt she was running out of options, so in the evening, she dug up some cassava from the neighbour's garden. He discovered her and beat her for stealing the cassava, and Gloria returned home empty-handed and ashamed. However, community members and groups took pity on the family's situation: a church leader gave Gloria's children some bananas when she discovered they had not eaten for days, and a youth group provided the family with a loan of 20 kg of cassava flour. Despite the 'immoral' act of theft, community members showed understanding and empathy for Gloria and her family, and instead of punishment, they sought to address the underlying cause of the theft: lack of access to food.

The willingness to share food and even provide monetary support is evident in the data from both Kenya and Uganda. As noted in previous sections, unpaid debt can also cause conflict within the community. This was the case in Kakuma, where a young man borrowed money from various individuals and shops in the camp. As he saw his debt balance rise with no prospect of settling it, he decided to flee to South Sudan. The people he had borrowed from began approaching his cousins remaining in Kakuma, asking about the money he had borrowed. A community elder from the young man's tribe had been the trustee of the loan; therefore, he was under particular pressure to settle the debt. The lenders wanted him to sell his house and the iron-sheet roof to repay the loan. The elder was distressed; he was the caretaker of several vulnerable children and was elderly himself, so repaying the loan and keeping his house would be difficult. When he shared his concerns with a cousin of the young man who had fled to South Sudan, the cousin arranged to repay the loan monthly. This endeavour ensured that the elder could remain in his home and that the tension among the community members involved was successfully reduced.

The current coping practices among refugees lead to changed conflict patterns: loans are not being repaid, people resort to theft to survive, bridewealth conflicts intensify, and when life-saving crops are destroyed, it can lead to heated conflict. As this chapter illustrates, the endeavours by community-led groups, councils of elders, church groups, and leaders, as well as individuals, to ensure peace are essential to mitigating conflicts exacerbated by current conditions.

Association of motorcycle drivers in Rhino Camp gathered to discuss escalation of local conflicts following the aid cuts in early 2025 @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

A young man with hearing impairment works as casual labour plastering walls in Rhino Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC.

8. Concluding remarks

The aid cuts have long-term consequences, undermining health and educational opportunities, as well as hopes for a better future. More urgently, they have immediate consequences as people are forced to focus on survival today rather than opportunities for tomorrow and beyond. In this report, we have shown how the aid cuts have changed the conditions for coping. They have narrowed the available options for survival for both those who remain in the camps and those who leave. While these coping practices may indeed ensure survival, some exacerbate tensions and lead to conflict. The conditions for coping in the context of aid reduction differ between Uganda and Kenya. Greater mobility and farming are possible in Rhino Camp, though increased reliance on farming creates conflict over leasing arrangements for farmland with the host community. In addition, the proximity of Rhino Camp to refugee homes in South Sudan makes the practice of "returning to fund refugeehood" (Omata and Gidron 2025) more feasible; some household members generate income north of the border to support others in refuge.

Despite restraints and desperation, refugees respond to changing conditions. We have emphasised their subjectivity to show how they assess their conditions for coping and how they engage in practice. As humanitarian institutions withdraw, people reflect on and interact more heavily with intimate others – relatives, neighbours, and friends. Whether combining households, seeking financial assistance, or arranging marriages, they receive support for survival, but they also create conflicts. Most of these conflicts are similar in type to those we have described in earlier reports (Degett and Whyte 2023; Degett et al. 2024). However, they are more frequent under current conditions, and fewer options are available to address them.

Conflicts are mitigated or adjudicated by both formal and informal actors. The formal or statutory actors are those supported by the state (police, judiciary, OPM, RWCs, DRS, CPPTs, elected Community Leaders) and by humanitarian organisations (international, bilateral, NGO). Many of these have been directly affected by the cutbacks, leaving them understaffed and under-resourced. Informal actors have been less directly affected, as they operate on a volunteer basis and continue their activities. They may be called upon more heavily as the statutory organisations contract. Indeed, this may look like increased "localisation" as dependence on more remote agencies declines. Yet the informal actors are in fact less able to take on the extra load, as they must devote more time and resources to their own survival.

Restaurant after lunch hour in Kalobeyei Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

9. Feedback and reflections

The findings in this report have been presented to multiple stakeholders for feedback and suggestions, namely the Community Forums in Rhino Camp, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei, actors operating in the research locations, including UNHCR and humanitarian actors, and the Academic Advisory Board. The consultation meetings also provided an opportunity for the communities in which we conduct the research to validate and nuance the findings and inform us whether any contextual aspects have been misrepresented or omitted in the report.

Across all consultations, there was strong appreciation for the findings. The participants based in Rhino Camp, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei recognised and affirmed the examples from the field and the overall contextual descriptions of the current conditions in the camps, including the challenges related to reduced aid and shifting conflict dynamics. According to the members, the findings of ASPIRE will help stakeholders – both formal, international, and community actors – understand community needs. As one member, a community leader in Rhino Camp, explained:

"[The] findings help the actors of conflict resolution in the community, (…) it gives us [leaders] important information about our community and builds up the knowledge of our local leaders to understand [and] know deeper the conflict areas."

In the face of reduced funding, Community Forum members across both locations stressed that to uphold peaceful coexistence, these efforts must be consistent and cannot grow without funding. Therefore, there is a great need for donors to continue supporting efforts to reduce conflicts. The members similarly emphasised the need to fund the community structures best placed to reach the community; for instance, supporting refugee leaders so they can reach the community in large numbers. With the current reductions in humanitarian aid, there is an increased need to support these structures, as highlighted by a member of the Community Forum in Kenya from an RLO:

"What happens when there [is] no more funding? So, the informal community setup like we've talked about, councils of elders… these people need to be trained, need to be empowered with the little resources [available] because they understand the complexity of their community, they will be able to deliver even though international organisations have moved out. Because they have been there before the international organisations and they will be there after them (…). If we empower them, we train them, and we give them [the] mandate to continue to solve problems in the community, to continue to advocate for communities… as we understand, traditionally they have never been paid right? So, they will continue to do the good job. So, the international organisations need only to do a bit of [scaling up] of their skills into conflict resolutions, into mitigation of this robbery, theft, GBV – name them."

Several recommendations for action were proposed by the stakeholders. Numerous members of the Community Forums highlighted the need to train youth and equip them with peacebuilding knowledge to foster community change. Some young people in the camps are orphans or lack formative actors in their lives, while at the same time being phased out of food assistance, leading some to adopt negative coping practices such as theft or robbery, which again leads to more conflict. One member of Rhino Camp highlighted that community leaders need a deeper understanding of how to educate children and youth in peacebuilding and conflict management.

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Abbreviations

AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity
ARVs	Antiretrovirals
ASPIRE	Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CEFM	Child, Early, and Forced Marriage
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
CPPTs	Community Peace and Protection Teams
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DDG	Danish Demining Group
DR Congo	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DRS	Department of Refugee Services
EU INTPA	European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships
EU	European Union
FAs	Field Assistants
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
HDP	Humanitarian Development and Peace (actors or interventions)
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGA	Income-Generating Activities
INCAF	International Network on Conflict and Fragility
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KES	Kenyan Shilling
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KISEDP	Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan
KPR	Kenya Police Reserve
LC	Local Council
MFB	Minimum Food Basket
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisation
NRG	NGO Refugee Group

NWoW	New Way of Working
OECD DAC Committee	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PARTOCA	Participatory Research Team on Community-led Action
POCs	Protection of Civilians
PSN	Persons with Special Needs
PTR	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
rCSI	Reduced Food Coping Strategy Index
ReDSS	Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
REF	Refugee Engagement Forum
REF	Refugee Engagement Forum
RLO	Refugee-led Organisation
RWC	Refugee Welfare Council
UCPH	University of Copenhagen
UGX	Ugandan Shillings
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	US Dollar
VSLAs	Village Savings and Loan Associations
WBG	World Bank Group
WFP	World Food Programme

DRC DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency